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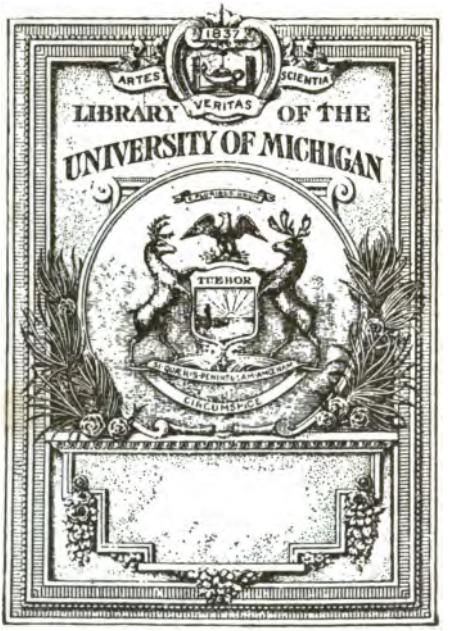

THE GIFT OF
Mr. William Randall

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A27m

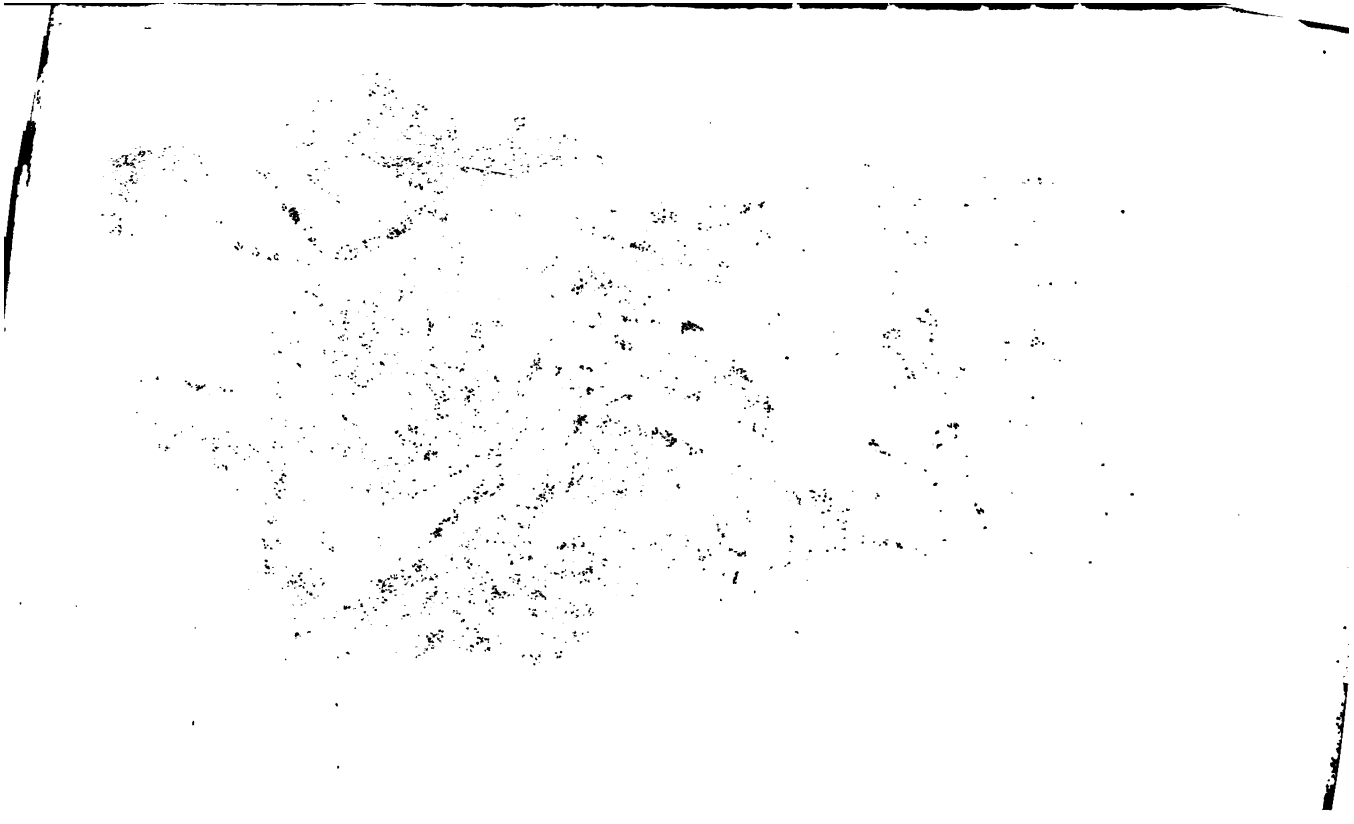
THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

"WAS IT A PICTURE YOU FOUGHT ABOUT, MR. BAXENDALE?"

THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

WILLSON DOUGLAS

NEW YORK
HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON



Robert Aitken

THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

HUDSON DOUGLAS, pseud.

author of

"A MILLION A MINUTE," ETC.

Illustrations by

WILL GREFÉ

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Mr. William Randall
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THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

CHAPTER ONE

TIME VS. MONEY

A BLUFF-LOOKING, fresh-faced, keen-eyed man with a grizzled mustache — But, of course, you know R. Rufus Caffyn by sight, and it will save time to set down at once that R. Rufus Caffyn, in a motor-coat and a somewhat fractious temper, came striding out from the elevator on to the promenade-deck.

The *Mauretania* was carrying a full complement of folk in a hurry westward with the late Fall. Coal had not been spared on the passage. Her pilot was doing his best to live up to his reputation as he conned her in by the Ambrose Channel at the extreme legal limit of speed. Still, Mr. Caffyn was not content. He frowned blackly at Bay Ridge in the distance, and then his irascible glance met that of a younger man, who was contemplatively whiling away, in a quiet corner and with the help of a choice cigar, that last hour of leisure on board. Caffyn's face cleared a little.

"Hullo, Bolter!" he remarked. "Isn't this desperate? We're simply crawling along. I told the captain I'd miss my connection if we didn't dock by six: and, now, that's all U. P. Talk about ocean grayhounds — they ought to call this the Dachshund Line!"

The younger man had nodded pleasantly in response to the greeting, had heard the plaint in grave silence, and, having briefly studied the shore-line abeam, pulled out his watch.

"I'll bet you twenty thousand dollars," he offered, after consulting the dial, "that we dock by, or before, six o'clock this evening."

"Done with you," the famous financier agreed, instantly. "I'll take that twenty thousand from you before I go ashore — although it won't pay for pipe-lights compared with what losing my connection will cost me. But have the cash counted, Bolter, and be ready to hand it over. I'll find you up here, I suppose, at six o'clock."

He hurried away, his coat flying wide, and "Bolter" Baxendale looked after him with a slow smile. He rather liked Rufus Caffyn. But the smile faded, slowly, too, as he realized how rash he had been with his wager. Then, he shrugged his shoulders, and so dismissed the whole matter from his mind. It was not his nature to cross any bridge before he had actually come to it; and he would not look at his watch again.

A dark-faced, furtive-looking individual, conspicuous in astrachan, came out on deck, humming

"Home, Sweet Home" to himself, very much out of tune, with a strong foreign accent. Through the haze ahead, New York was already visible, and the passengers were gathering forward to see as much of it as they might before the sun set. He had just been released from attendance upon the Customs officials in the saloon, and, curiously enough, the diamonds with which he had been dazzling all eyes during the voyage had, for the nonce, disappeared. Out of sight was no doubt out of mind with him, since he had somehow omitted to include them in his declaration of dutiable effects: an inadvertence through which his adopted country stood to lose several hundred dollars. He looked round, and, grinning consciously as he caught Baxendale's eye, went his way, songless, to join the throng at the rail.

A hundred others passed and repassed the solitary soliloquist in his sheltered corner. Everywhere on board the Titanic liner prevailed that pleasant bustle and stir which always precedes the moment of stepping ashore. Everyone was visibly glad to be done with the unavoidable sameness of the equally unavoidable days at sea. An atmosphere of general cordiality and good-will had for the moment vanquished even the most frigid reserve. The contemplative onlooker with the cigar saw, and smiled to see, two by no means meek members of the most haughty *haute noblesse* of Europe fraternizing with a Cockney bagman whom they had till then consistently snubbed, and who was volubly directing

their attention to the natural beauties of Brooklyn. He noticed that even the ultra-select among the women on board did not disdain to answer condescendingly remarks addressed to them by others of their sex, of whose existence they had previously seemed to be unaware.

His own attitude and expression, withal, were a little detached, indifferent. He was not so eagerly interested as the bulk of his fellow-passengers were in the abrupt, irregular outline of the Island City, which was rising redly ahead through the haze under the setting sun. But, since he had seen it all on other occasions, and could now see it very comfortably over the heads of the crowd, there was really no particular reason why he should incommode himself by crushing in among them and their enthusiasms.

And there was, to tell the truth, nothing particularly inspiriting to him about this home-coming after the years he had spent in Europe. He had brought back with him, apart from the baggage he had just declared, only some twenty thousand dollars in cash, sole remnant of the handsome fortune he had inherited on his father's death, a heart he believed to be broken, and some intangible quantity of that lustrous polish which, it is popularly supposed, only a rolling stone can acquire. He assumed, and rightly, that none of these was in itself a satisfactory asset.

Bay Ridge was away astern, and the crowd crossed the ship to gaze at the Statue of Liberty; but he

stayed where he was, watching Governor's Island draw near, idly wondering how his friends there might have fared since he had left them to their life of routine, and set out to live a life of his own wherein routine had no part. He could not but admit to himself that he had been happy among them — happier far than he was to-day, for all his pleasant, impassive smile, his habitual, indolent air of contentment with circumstances.

It was no doubt that slow, sleepy smile of his which, coupled with some indefinable charm of manner and a good presence, had always won for him, among both men and women of all sorts, an easy and enduring popularity, unsought on his part. He was tall, something over six feet, straight, supple, square-shouldered, a credit to his West Point training; unobtrusively dressed in a very well-cut suit of gray tweed, with a light overcoat on one arm. His somewhat aquiline features spoke of constant exposure to sunshine and wind and rain. And, sometimes as he smiled, there would show for an instant from behind his lazy, good-humored eyes that reckless, irresistible spirit which had earned him his nickname, a spirit that has appealed to both men and women since the world began.

At any rate, he had until lately been on the best of terms with the world. And, if he had made few acquaintances during the voyage, that was because he had been too preoccupied to respond very cordially to any advances in this direction. A broken heart seeks quietness rather than company.

But you are by no means to take it for granted that this Bolter Baxendale was one of those inane sentimentalists who roam the green earth, mourning each pretty face they pass in the street. On the contrary, he was an eminently sane, practical, matter-of-fact young man, with no taste whatever for such amorous idiocy. And, hard hit though he undoubtedly was, for he had been absolutely blind to the fascination of not a few pairs of very bright eyes on board, it is not to be supposed that he was wearing his heart on his sleeve.

A passing reporter espied the traveler, and stopped, on the chance of copy.

"Good-evening, Mr. Baxendale," said he, cheerily. "How have you been all this time? What's the latest from London? You've come back to wake New York up out of its sleep, I suppose. Things have been quite dull here since you left us."

At the corners of Bolter Baxendale's eyes gathered tiny wrinkles. He laughed, and his laugh was good to hear.

"You've surely got a long memory," he remarked. "You have the advantage of me in more ways than one."

"You'd have to have a long memory, too, if you were a newspaper man," retorted the other. "My name's Burdick — Lester Burdick. I said good-luck to you the day you sailed on the *Lucania*. I spoke to you in London — at Hurlingham, the day you had that unfortunate accident with the Prince of Jetland at polo; but, of course, you were too

unhappy at the moment to take much notice of me. And we've heard about you since then. You've done us all credit in Europe, and, as you know, that isn't always what happens when our young men with money set out to cut a swath on the other side. Some of them make no end of a conspicuous hullabaloo while they're blowing in the old man's millions, and want to shout drinks for the whole wide world whenever they win a wad. However, the public here will be glad to know that you're at the home-base again. D'ye mean to be long in New York? I suppose you've heard that the lid's off it a little. There's lots of sport to be had these days."

"Is Chancefield still doing business?" Baxendale asked, without any very active interest; and he offered his interlocutor a cigar.

The newspaper man nodded briskly.

"Still doing business at the old stand," he replied, "and no earthly limit on anything."

"I may stop in town for a day or two — if we dock before six," Baxendale said lightly.

"Then, I'll probably see you again," said Burdick. "I'm only on this sea-faring assignment for the afternoon, in another man's place. I'll let the inhabitants of Manhattan know that you're home, anyhow. That will cheer them up. I must get hold of R. Rufus Caffyn now, so you'll excuse me."

"I saw him being chased off the bridge a minute ago," Baxendale obligingly mentioned, and then fell to frowning. He had had no idea till then that his doings abroad had brought him newspaper no-

toriety. But, like most of his countrymen, he was disposed to allow the press every liberty. And, since the press was equally disposed to suit itself, he dismissed that matter, too, from his mind, threw away his cigar-stump, and took to the other side of the ship, where he carefully counted over twenty thousand dollars from among the bills in his pocket. That left only a very few, of minor value, which he put back apart, as he fell to strolling there alone.

The Hudson River seemed to him unusually crowded that afternoon. Every variety of craft crossed the path, and helped to hinder the progress of the *Mauretania.* But the interest he took in all the maneuvers by means of which the unwieldy vessel was at length headed toward her pier might have been purely impersonal for all the outward concern he displayed. The least hurried of the leisurely tourists among the gathering at the ship's other rail was in comparison with him quite feverishly excited. He only sauntered round to that side after the first hawser had been led ashore by a tug, and, while the others fled below to besiege the first gangway, leaned idly there, looking down at the no less-excited crowd on the pier.

Another hawser was led ashore, and the winches were soon at work, but some little time still intervened before the leviathan's plates at length touched very lightly the fenders on the pier-face. Bolter Baxendale looked at his watch. The time was nine minutes past six.

He glanced down again, and saw a light gangway

being hurriedly lifted on board by a whip. Across that hurriedly darted R. Rufus Caffyn, coat flying wide. The gangway was dropped no less expeditiously, and in its place was raised the heavier structure necessary for the safe debarkation of the less important multitude. Rufus Caffyn had jumped into a motor-car that was waiting. He turned, and, scanning the side of the ship which now towered above him, caught sight of the solitary figure at the promenade-deck rail. He made a megaphone of his two hands. "See Burdick about that bet," he shouted, and was instantly whirled away.

When he went below, Baxendale saw the reporter still busy in the saloon, and waited till the journalist was disengaged. Then, he held out in a very neat roll the sum he had lost — a loss that left him practically a beggar.

"What's that for?" the newspaper man demanded, staring and making no motion to take the money.

"Caffyn asked me to hand it over to you," explained Bolter Baxendale, patiently. "It's a bet I lost to him. Didn't he say anything to you about it?"

"What a chance for me to retire on a well-earned fortune!" exclaimed the reporter, lugubriously. "Bet you lost, Mr. Baxendale? Lost nothing! You won your bet, bless you. I was down here myself, keeping time for Mr. Caffyn. He crossed the gangway at exactly one minute before six — and a mighty glad man he was to part with his twenty

thousand. Here's the wad. Better count it, and give me a clean discharge. Your luck's in to-day, Mr. Baxendale."

Baxendale did not at once take the roll extended to him. He pulled out his watch again. "What time do you make it?" he asked.

The reporter produced his own Ingersoll.

"It's exactly eight minutes past six, Eastern time," he returned, "and the ship's clock's right to a second."

Baxendale looked at the saloon clock, and slipped his repeater back into its pocket.

"All right," said he carelessly, and accepted the bills the other was still holding out to him. "I don't quite understand how it's happened, but my own confounded time is close on ten minutes fast. It was really a fool bet I made, and I deserved to lose it. Come and see if we can't induce my steward to get us a bottle of Boy."

But the busy Burdick, averring that he had no time to lose before getting his copy to the telephone, made off with a hearty handshake, and Baxendale saw him no more that day. He himself had no present inclination for the champagne he had suggested, and shortly went ashore, where he yielded himself with unfailing good humor to the further inquisition of the Customs' searchers there.

Keys in hand, he looked on tranquilly while the officer detailed to examine his baggage turned over the contents of trunks, gun-cases, hat-boxes, bun-

dles containing rods, riding-gear, all the impedimenta of a sportsman's kit. He blushed a little at sight of the paint-boxes, easels, umbrella and stool exposed to the public gaze, and was glad he had had his canvases shipped across in advance by an express company — all save one, which he was carrying in a package himself, and had not set down even while he was at work with his keys.

"What's that?" the official demanded, having concluded his search otherwise.

"A picture," the traveler explained, fuming inwardly. He knew that it might have to be displayed, but had hoped that would not be necessary. "A portrait — a friend of mine. D'you want me to open it up?"

He swore under his breath as the other nodded.

"It's against the rules to let anything pass," the man said in self-defense, and he was evidently relieved in that his victim did not scowl venomously at him; for even a Customs' searcher has some human feeling, and does not necessarily thrive on black looks. He would only have glanced at the sketch in oils Baxendale presently had to show, but that it commanded his closer attention.

"By the powers," he exclaimed involuntarily, as he gazed at it, "that one would look well beside ye, sorr!

"I'm sorry to have had to throuble ye," he went on, aware that he had overstepped the bounds of proper official deportment, and striving after apol-

ogy; "but I can't be sorry that I've had a glimpse of her — and I hope you'll excuse me for saying so."

Baxendale's forehead cleared of a frown. The Irishman's ingenuous speech had not failed of effect. Nor was that diplomatist unobservant.

"I wish ye had brought herself with ye — instead of her picture," he remarked, holding the package while Baxendale refastened the loosened cord. And Baxendale, looking up for an instant, exclaimed amazedly, almost without volition:

"The princess — me!"

He could have bitten his tongue out as he realized what it had let slip, but the other's face had resumed its mask of official indifference, and he was already busy, stamping the rest of the baggage. Perhaps, he had not heard, thought Baxendale, and hoped it might be so. At any rate, he himself and his personal property were now enfranchised. He called a couple of passing porters, in haste to be gone from among the crowd, and, looking about him while the men were busy with his belongings, was mildly amused to see the individual of the astrachan coat and the invisible diamonds, protesting vociferously against being conducted by two officers toward the Customs inspector's quarters, there to answer for the grave crime of having made a fraudulent declaration to Uncle Sam.

Had he known in advance exactly what he meant to do when he landed, Baxendale would have sent in a Marconigram ordering a car to meet him at the

dock. But he had no definite plans in his mind, and was content with a taxi-cab, or rather, to be correct, with several of them: as many as could contain himself and his baggage. That disposed of among them, he settled himself in the first, and, after a moment's reflection, told its driver to take him to the St. Regulus. He soon found, however, that his twentieth-century caravan was attracting considerably more attention as it whirled along the streets in his wake than he desired, or was willing to put up with, and he halted it for a moment to bid the baggage-carriers take some other route to the hotel.

Freed from their attendance, he was able to proceed unregarded, and looked about him curiously as he lay back on the cushions. The stir of the streets was enlivening after the solitude of the sea. The faint haze of Indian-summer dusk was softening the harsher outlines of the crenelated cañons through which he was being carried, shading the shrill glare of the lights in a myriad windows above and about him.

He could scarcely recognize the district through which he was driving, so many strange changes had come upon it since he had last been in New York. But Fifth Avenue at the hour of nightfall thrilled him again, as it had been wont to do when he had first set eyes on its long, lamplit vista. The night was fine, with a hint of frost in the air that stirred his pulses pleasantly. When he at length reached the St. Regulus, he felt better pleased with himself

and his circumstances than he had been since he first became possessed of the picture he carried with him.

The quiet, self-contained atmosphere that obtains within the imposing pile promised to suit his taste exactly, and, as to his pocket, he had not yet acquired the useful habit of counting cost in advance. Scarcely had he registered when his baggage-convoy arrived. He was allotted a comfortable suite on one of the upper floors, and there a deft, soft-spoken valet took charge of him and his belongings, turning him out in excellent shape for the evening after a most refreshing hot bath.

The figure his dressing-glass had reflected, while he finally satisfied himself that his tie was quite as it should be, was surely reason sufficient for the irrepressible smile bestowed on him by a pretty chamber-maid he met on his way to the elevator, and for the fact that she took no exception to the return he bestowed on her. Even the elevator-boy was obviously impressed by his presence, and bowed him into, and out of, the car with unusual deference.

In the dining-room, the austere head-waiter, with a troop of underlings in close attendance, devoted himself to the service throughout a meal that did the St. Regulus chef every credit, and Baxendale was conscious of not a few interested, inquiring glances directed at him by others of the gay throng dining there. But he put these down to the fact that a lock of white hair, very vivid in the black tuft brushed back from his forehead, always made him somewhat conspicuous. He had thought more than

once of having it dyed, but the idea was distasteful to him. In any case, he was quite accustomed to, and unembarrassed by, the attention bestowed on him, which he attributed entirely to his unusual forelock.

After dinner, he retired to the lounge with one of the best cigars the hotel could supply. But, sunk in his own reflections there, he soon grew restless again. An uncontrollable impulse took him up to his own rooms. He unpacked his precious picture, set it reverently on the mantel-shelf, and sat down before the coal-fire to stare up at it with far-away, clouding eyes. His spirits were falling rapidly again. He began to feel lonely and ill at ease; and, at length, he got suddenly to his feet. He could endure no more of the memories called up by this fair pictured face, looking down at him with the same enigmatic smile that had so puzzled him when he had first met its original. He must seek some effective anodyne for the ache that was once more affecting both heart and head.

He carefully repacked the picture, locked it away, and rang the bell.

"See that the fire is kept up," he ordered, when the valet appeared. "I may not be back for two or three hours," and so set forth from the hotel on foot, turning down Fifth Avenue till he came to the cross-street wherein Jerry Chancefield was still doing business at the old stand, as Burdick, the reporter, had told him. He had not intended to spend his first evening ashore there, but, "I must kill time

somehow," he said to himself, defensively, "and, after all, that's what money's most useful for."

As he went up the steps of the decent brownstone house in which the goddess of chance was enshrined, he was fingering in one of his pockets the forty thousand dollars that were his fortune.

CHAPTER TWO

MONEY VS. TIME

IT was Jerry Chancefield himself who came to the door in answer to the signal Baxendale sent in by the electric bell. And Jerry was no less portly, prosperous-looking, correct in dress and deportment, than he had been when Baxendale first made his acquaintance. The only outward change in him was that his close-cut hair had turned from gray to white, a change that added to his eminently respectable mien and appearance.

He scrutinized his visitor intently for a few seconds, and then:

"God bless me, Mr. Baxendale!" he exclaimed, hospitably effusive. "Is it really you? You gave me a bit of a start at first — it's years since we've worked on that old signal you sent in. But it's like old times to see you again. Come right in. You're very welcome."

The hallway was in darkness, a precaution partly strategic, but Jerry remedied that as soon as the street door was shut, and Baxendale, with a word of greeting now that he could see the other more clearly, handed hat and coat to a boy in buttons,

pocketed his check, and sauntered forward with the proprietor of the establishment.

The house throughout was sumptuously furnished, but everywhere it was evident that good taste as well as money had gone to its making. Among the palms in the vestibule stood a marble dryad, very decent in vine leaves, which looked life-like under the tinted lights in its corner. A clear glow from under the cornice displayed with effect the valuable pictures about the walls. The polished hardwood floor and the rugs and portières all harmonized in a general scheme, of which the keynote was a rich quietness. There was not so much as the chink of a coin to be heard in that part of the establishment.

"Going to have a bit of a flutter, Mr. Baxendale?" Jerry asked, "or just come in for a look round? You won't find very many of the old set still to the fore, I'm afraid, but everything else is as it has always been: and you know your way about."

"Are you still matching millions, Jerry?" Baxendale asked in turn, and Chancefield regarded him with a smile of approval.

"You were always a hot un', Mr. Baxendale," he remarked, genially; "but I've never been afraid of you, have I, now? I'll cover any stake you like to put up on any game that's played in my house, and, if you break me, I won't whimper. So, I'll see you again presently. And, just in case I forget before you go off with your winnings, the code letter now is C. Next time you call, push the bell long

and short, twice running. See you again, presently." And the proprietor turned in at a curtained doorway, through which Baxendale caught a glimpse of a comfortable room wherein was standing before the fire, impatiently fluttering a cheque in his fingers, and no doubt awaiting Jerry's return, another acquaintance, one Geoffrey Paige, a young man for whom he had never had any great liking.

He pursued his own leisurely way to the billiard-room, built out at the back of the house, and sat there for a few minutes with a cup of coffee and a cigarette, watching a game in progress. As soon as it was over, and a hundred dollars had changed hands between the two boys from Yale who had been playing, he went upstairs. On the landing above, he met Beverly Caffyn, a whilom companion of his, who greeted him gaily.

"What ho, old sport!" cried that exuberant gentleman. "Here you are again, eh? You haven't been long. Some one told me the papers were saying the *Mauretania* had you on board, and she only got in this evening. I know, because I ought to have been at the dock to meet my old Uncle Rufus. Did you happen to hear him mention that he meant to cut me out of his will because I wasn't on the spot to welcome him home?"

"He didn't seem to have counted on seeing you," Baxendale answered, laughing. "He was half-way to the Grand Central in a motor-car before any one else had even got ashore. What luck are you having here? Still wasting your time at Trente-et-

quarante? Why don't you have a dash at my game?"

"Haven't got the nerve," Mr. Caffyn admitted, dejectedly. "I've seen too many men go *phut* at your game, Bolter. But I'll come in and watch you play, if you like. I can only afford cheap pleasures like that on my little income. Keep a place for me behind you, and I'll be up in a minute."

Baxendale looked into another room, where a faro table was doing very brisk business, but saw no one there whom he knew, and the faces round the card-table in the cozy apartment over the billiard-room were all unfamiliar to him. He went up another stair, and found his own particular game in full swing in the front room which had always been sacred to it. It was a simple affair of a smoothly spinning, horizontal wheel, marked off into sections, each of which bore the picture and name of a horse, set inside a fixed frame with a nick in it, for the winning-post; and it is best known, perhaps, by the name of "Sandown."

A man among the players nodded to him as he entered. It was Cullen Seabury, who had been at West Point with him.

"Back again, Bolter?" was that taciturn individual's sole greeting, as Baxendale came to a stop behind his chair. The man had evidently been making money. A pile of gold lay within his crooked elbow. He put fifty dollars on the next turn of the wheel, and, looking round, smiled a further welcome. The croupier set the wheel in motion

with a deft twist of his fingers, and, after a breathless interval, *Esmeralda* came home. A few hundred dollars changed hands, but the house had the best of it. The croupier, having paid and received, favored Baxendale with a swift glance of recognition.

"When did *Bolter* turn up last?" the newcomer asked him, and the man's thin lips parted to emit the curt information. "'Bout ten rounds ago."

The others about the table, seated or standing, men of all ages and callings, at all stages on the supposed road to ruin, but all outwardly impassive and calm, conventionally correct in starch and broadcloth, looked up at the questioner. A whisper went round the board, "Bolter Baxendale, the plunger — broke the bank at Monte Carlo a dozen times. Won two hundred thousand from R. Rufus Caffyn on the *Mauretania* this afternoon — yes, on a single bet. Ask Jerry, then, if you won't believe me — it's all in the last edition. We'll see some sport here before long!" But, if this reached the ears of its object, he showed no sign that he had heard, and made no move to justify the final prediction. For a long time, he stood where he was, idly watching the course of the game.

It has already been stated of Baxendale that he was eminently sane, practical and matter of fact. It were almost needless, therefore, to add that he had not impoverished himself in pursuit of any particular "system." He had simply played and won or lost, sometimes winning enormous stakes, but more often

losing steadily, on a principle that afforded him the maximum of excitement and interest in return for his expenditure.

"If you take long chances, you either make good or go broke in quick time," was the essence of Bolter Baxendale's creed. "And what's the use of prolonging the agony! As soon as I'm all in, I'll quit, for good. Till then, I'll take forty to one every time it's offered in reason."

And it was this principle, applied to the particular form of gambling he affected, that had earned him the soubriquet whereby he was best known on both sides of the Atlantic, thanks to the present vogue of the personal paragraph. But, with him, play was simply an expensive distraction, not an inborn vice.

He leaned over Seabury's shoulder, and laid a thousand-dollar bill on *Bolter*. The others, staking their five or twenty or fifty dollars, at very much lower odds for a very much easier win, nudged their neighbors, smiled furtively. A thousand dollars was no great sum to venture at Chancefield's, but Bolter's breakneck play had more than once in the old days hit Jerry hard, and they were all deeply interested in its outcome on this occasion.

The croupier whispered some message to a boy in buttons behind him, and started the wheel as the boy left the room. *Maid Marian* won. The croupier collected twelve hundred dollars and paid out eighty, the biggest haul he had yet made that evening. But, although his salary was supplemented by a percentage on winnings, no symptom of elation

was evoked by that little coup. And, when Baxendale, quite unperturbed, backed *Bolter* again, for a thousand and twenty-five dollars, some shadow which might have been a faint frown flitted for a moment over the croupier's professionally expressionless countenance. He understood that this player was going to back *Bolter* steadily now, to the limit of resources as to whose sum-total he could formulate no guess. But he, like the rest of the world, supposed Baxendale was rolling in money, and, in his natural anxiety for his own welfare as well as his employer's, had sent word to Jerry Chancefield that the house was up against a hard proposition.

The wheel spun again, and again the house won. The croupier's messenger had returned, was once more standing motionless at his shoulder, supplementing the Argus eyes of his superior to the best of his by no means limited ability. Soon, Beverly Caffyn appeared, and one or two other would-be players dropped in. But Jerry Chancefield, that very astute old sinner, stayed downstairs till another dozen rounds of the race had been won and lost. And in none of these was there any profit for *Bolter's* backer, although once it seemed an absolute certainty that the very scanty margin of the big wheel which carried the heaviest odds was bound to stop opposite the black line that was the winning-post.

One by one the other players had given up betting, but Caffyn, gleefully excited, was following Bolter Baxendale's luck, round after round, to the extent of a five-dollar gold piece; which somehow looked singu-

larly small and forlorn beside the bills Baxendale was placing on the same spot with unfailing regularity. Jerry Chancefield came into the room, very casually, as the wheel spun again. Baxendale increased his stake to two thousand dollars, and lost it. He promptly played four thousand which went the same way. He laid six thousand on *Bolter,* and Jerry Chancefield, whose risk was now two hundred and forty thousand, scratched an ear contemplatively. The others had no eyes for anything but the spinning wheel. *Bolter* finished at the extreme pole from the winning-post.

"My holy hat!" said Cullen Seabury, under his breath as Baxendale laid down on the table eight thousand-dollar bills. And even the assiduous Caffyn forgot for the nonce to follow these with his own infinitesimal stake. If by chance *Bolter,* long overdue, on an average, for a win, should reach the post in the present instance, Jerry Chancefield would be mulcted of three hundred and twenty thousand dollars. And, wealthy as Jerry was known to be, such a sweep could not but be a bit of a blow to him. Baxendale glanced over at Jerry, but the older gambler's face, like his own, was an immobile mask. They had that virtue in common, the professional and the amateur; both of them would face ruin itself without sign of flinching.

"All in?" asked the croupier in a strange, husky whisper. "Then, they're off." Caffyn, fumbling with his five-dollar piece, would still have followed his leader, but he was too late. As it fell from his

nervous fingers, the croupier pushed it savagely back toward him without looking up from the wheel.

That was whirling noiselessly. A tense silence prevailed. All the onlookers except Baxendale were holding their breaths. He was breathing evenly, undisturbed. And when chance brought *Robin Hood* home a winner he did not change countenance in any degree: although even Chancefield, case-hardened and accustomed to ups and downs as he had been all his life, was scratching one ear prodigiously, the only sign of agitation he had ever been known to permit himself. But, of course, Jerry Chancefield had promised that he might go on without limit, and did not know that the stake might not be doubled again and again, or that he might not in the end lose several or even all of those millions he had accumulated.

Everyone else was regarding Baxendale with a species of fearful admiration, and not till he had laid down his next stake — and his last — did anyone break the long silence. But at sight of the hundred-dollar note he tossed on the table the strain suddenly relaxed and a babel of conversation began. Chancefield ceased to scratch his ear. On the croupier's face an expression of abject relief appeared. Beverly Caffyn replaced his despised five dollars. One or two of the others also took up their game again. The wheel once more revolved, and *Bolter* won.

That cut the talk in two. A species of paralysis seemed to have seized them all. One man, about to light a cigarette, stopped in the act, his face full of

horrified sympathy, to stare like the others at Baxendale. The match burned till it reached his fingers. He dropped it with a yelp of pain, and that again broke the spell. Baxendale picked up the notes the croupier thrust across the table to him, tucked them into one of his waistcoat-pockets, nodded good-night to the men he knew, and quietly withdrew from the room.

At the door, he met Jerry Chancefield again, also on his way downstairs.

"I nearly knocked you to-night, Jerry, didn't I?" he remarked, in his usual unconcerned tone. "But I started just one round too soon."

"You certainly gave me a bit of a scare, Mr. Baxendale," Jerry admitted, frankly. "I think I must be getting too old to buck against you young bloods. But, still, whenever you want to scare me again, I'm willing. I like a little flutter myself at times, and most of the others who come about here these days are little better than pikers. Will you have anything before you go? No? Well, very glad to have seen you again. Good-night, Mr. Baxendale." He did not close the door till the young man was well down the street, and even found time to nod affably to a passing policeman. Then, as he set the safety-catch again: "I don't quite know what to think," said Jerry Chancefield to himself, "and I'd like to know if it's true that he took two hundred thousand off Rufus Caffyn this afternoon. I don't believe he did, and it's a sure thing that he dropped about the whole of his own roll in Europe. I like the lad —

he's a dead-game sport, and I'd be sorry to see him short — but I don't like that infernal habit he has of hanging on till all's blue. I don't like it a little bit!"

Bolter Baxendale would not have been very well pleased had he known what an intimate acquaintance with many of the details of his career abroad the kindly Mr. Chancefield possessed, but his mind was far away from New York at that moment. To the dire financial loss he had just suffered, he did not devote another thought. It was not his nature to cry over milk that was spilt. Now that the zest of the hazard was over, the present as well as the future had lost all interest for him, and his mind was once more occupied with the past.

The sound of hurrying footsteps behind him interrupted his train of thought. Someone hailed him by name. He looked round, halted, and shook hands mechanically with the fat-faced, snub-nosed young man in thin evening clothes, who, without a hat, had followed him from Jerry Chancefield's. "Well, Paige," he said cordially enough, although he had never cared much for Geoffrey Paige, "still hitting it up? How's the cough? No better? Then, why don't you wear a hat on your silly head, eh?"

"Bolter, I'm in a hole," the other said breathlessly, ignoring all else in his eagerness. "I wish you'd let me have some money. Will you? I'll give you it back to-morrow safe."

"How much d'you want?" queried Baxendale, dubiously. He knew that Paige, like himself, was

accustomed to think in thousands — and he had only four thousand dollars now of his own.

"Three thousand," Paige answered imploringly, and he laughed.

"Sure, you can have three thousand until to-morrow," he said, and counted over that amount. "I thought it would take five figures at least to keep you afloat till morning. Here you are. I'll be at the St. Regulus till to-morrow night. Come round in the afternoon, and tell me the news."

Paige grasped at the money, and turned away with a muttered word of thanks. There had been something very like fear in his shifty eyes. He was back at Chancefield's door before Baxendale had got halfway along the block. And Baxendale shook his head somewhat doubtfully as he went on.

Broadway was ablaze when he reached it. He turned mechanically up that lane of life, but only for a block or two. Its effervescent atmosphere jarred on his mood, and he took to a quiet cross-street again till he reached Fifth Avenue, which was almost empty at that hour. Its somber dignity suited better the frame of mind he was in, and, as he progressed uphill, an empty melancholy possessed him. By the time he reached the St. Regulus, life seemed scarely worth living.

He had no appetite for supper of any sort, and no present taste for the company of his kind. But, in the vestibule of the hotel, he was hailed by an exuberant young man who, with a couple of pretty girls in opera-cloaks for company, lacked only an-

other such as himself to make his party complete.

"Come on, Bolter," he insisted, as soon as they had shaken hands, "we're just going to toddle up Broadway a bit in the car, and drop in at Archambaud's or somewhere for a bite of — how about hot fatted calf? You ought to be hungry for that after the length of time you've been playing the prodigal, eh?"

The girls, with both of whom Baxendale was acquainted — one was, in fact, a sister of Seabury's — supplemented this invitation most cordially, but Baxendale was not in the humor for any such mild dissipation, and, in the end, they had to accept his excuses: not, however, before he had faithfully promised to lunch with them the next day.

"Sherry's, at one sharp — don't forget," his festive friend called back to him from the doorway, so that the whole hotel might have heard. "Noisy young scoundrel!" said Baxendale to himself, on his way to the elevator, with a tired smile.

When he reached his own room, he found the fire there blazing cheerfully, and, having rung for whisky and soda, told the man who brought it that he would want nothing more that night.

"What clothes will you wear in the morning, sir?" asked the valet, withdrawing by way of the bedroom.

"Oh, the same suit I had on to-day," returned Baxendale indifferently, and, reaching for a pipe, made himself comfortable in a big arm-chair before the fire.

He was wide awake when he sat down, but, smoking and sipping his whisky, he soon fell into a somnolent state, very pleasant after the irksome strain of the thoughts that had threatened a sleepless night. His mind became calmer. He gradually sank into a deep doze.

Someone knocked softly at his door, but he did not answer. He was smiling as he slept. Time had turned back for him. He was living over again as he dreamed that perfect, unforgettable day on which he had first entered the gateway of dreams. He was once more in Marque, three thousand miles away.

CHAPTER THREE

WITHIN THE GATEWAY

IT was still dark, even in his dream, as he emerged stealthily from the white, thatched cottage in which he had obtained quarters of the simple fisher-folk it belonged to. He paused on the threshold for a moment to inhale the fragrance of the wood-smoke, which told that the pretty Truda was already astir, in her own domain, and might be trusted to make her appearance before very long with the strong brew of black coffee which would effectually wake everyone else. And, then, he went on, stepping softly across the sand lest she should hear him, to where the boat he had hired from his host was riding motionless at the end of its tripping-line on the mirror-like bay.

He hauled it ashore, put his painting-traps into it, cast off from the line, and so set forth unseen on his nefarious enterprise.

He rowed very quietly until he was well behind one of those long, low, rocky islets that fringe the coast there, and form a natural breakwater for the inner channel whose shore is sand. And, at length, safely screened from espial by any about the beach, he stepped his mast, hoisted the single lug-sail the

boat possessed, sat down in the stern-sheets among his gear, the tiller under one arm while he filled and lighted a pipe.

Day was breaking by then. The wind was light. He sat almost motionless, watching the Lesser Isles rise, golden and glittering, out of the still, sapphire sea, while the white veil of mist night had swathed round their shores melted away before the first warm breath of the sun. And he felt very well repaid for his early start by that fleeting vista of fairyland. For deep within him and seldom discovered was hidden the heart of an artist.

Astern, half-concealed among the sand-dunes about them, he could still catch a chance glimpse of the clustered cottages of the village, faint blue smoke curling from their chimney-tops. On one hand was the empty ocean, unflecked to the far horizon unless by an occasional cat's-paw. On the other, beyond the broken rock-barrier, outside which he could not have ventured except in calm weather, was visible every now and then a wide stretch of open country, heath-clad or brown under bracken, wooded here and there with clumps of dark pine, brighter hazel or silver birches. Far northward, a white splash of color at the sea's edge, and stretching back to the base of a great rock on which stood its guardian citadel, was the pretty little toy capital of the Principality of the Isle of Marque. To the south, the convex coastline gradually faded, between sea and sky, into the infinite. A spacious peace seemed to brood over

all, and in the morning air was the life-giving freshness of spring.

For an ecstatic hour he sailed on, with the breath of the fresh spring morning to lend him wings, and then turned into the sheltered channel again, followed that until he caught sight of a narrow, tree-clad creek, evidently the estuary of some insignificant fresh-water stream.

"This should be about the place," he said to himself, and, having taken in sail, pulled ashore, made his boat fast under an overhang of green branches. His easel and camp-stool and color-box made a plausible enough pretext for the trespass he had undertaken, and he went on inland afoot with them, whistling softly to himself.

There were evidently no roads in that neighborhood, and he could not discover so much as a path till, after a time, he came to a lightly trodden trail, which seemed to lead from the shore. He hesitated there for a moment, and then turned toward the sea.

A sudden steep acclivity brought back to his view the narrow channel below. He was looking down on a little bay, shaped like a horseshoe and almost inclosed by the heath-covered ridge he had climbed. Its waters lay still and warm under the unclouded sun, except where two moving objects were nearing the broad belt of sand about it. Baxendale drew suddenly back, crouching low in the bracken behind, as these emerged from the brine, and assumed the shapes of two human beings, adrip in dark bathing-

costumes. They ran, laughing, up the beach, and disappeared in some crevice among the rocks above it.

Baxendale was already making the best of his way from the spot, for he foresaw that they would probably follow the path.

"Oh, Lord!" he was muttering to himself. "I hope they didn't spot me — or I'll be fired before I know where I'm at." He was not, however, so blind in his flight but that he could coolly establish himself at his easel, his back to the beach, at a spot where no one could very conveniently pass him unnoticed. And there he was, sketching assiduously a sun-streaked corner of the wild woodland, when he heard light, feminine footsteps in the near distance, behind him.

These halted. He was apparently deaf. But his trained ears of a hunter had apprized him of whispering, of the fact that one pair of feet was approaching now. At the critical moment, he looked sharply round, in well-simulated surprise, got to his feet and stood, hat in hand, most guileless of mien, before a very demure young woman in a very charming costume.

He was subconsciously aware that it had been her specific intention to tell him he was trespassing there, and it was perhaps his expression and attitude that led her to temporize a little, as it was intended they should.

"Monsieur is an artist?" she said politely, in

A VERY DEMURE YOUNG WOMAN IN A VERY CHARMING COSTUME

French, and Baxendale almost blushed as he bowed assent.

"A poor disciple of the craft, mademoiselle," he returned deprecatingly, and, with a shrug of his shoulders, conveyed the impression of praiseworthy modesty aiming high.

"Is it permitted to regard?" she asked, interestedly.

"But certainly, to mademoiselle — and her friend," he adventured, and saw that her eyebrows arched a little at such audacity as she stooped to scrutinize the scanty outline he had blocked in. "It is but the beginning," he told her in self-defense, and she nodded mirthful understanding as she drew back again.

"Monsieur is evidently a stranger in Marque," she suggested, "and does not know that these are the princess's private grounds."

Baxendale gave a start of astonishment that proved him to be no mean actor.

"I am desolated, mademoiselle," he declared, "but a thousand thanks for informing me. In case the princess should happen to hear of my unpardonable intrusion, permit me to offer you for her my most humble apologies. I go at once and with the utmost haste." He picked up his camp-stool, and slammed its legs violently together, as some earnest of his intentions.

But the girl, having accomplished her purpose, seemed disposed to relent a little.

"One moment — one moment, monsieur!" she begged, and he turned again from the easel he was so very evidently about to snatch up. "The princess herself is close at hand, and may perhaps be inclined to relax the restrictions a little on monsieur's behalf. Her highness herself is an artist." She lingered a moment still. "And is not monsieur also English — or, it may be, an American?"

"I am an American," he informed her. "My name is Baxendale."

She laughed delightedly.

"Dear me!" Mr. Baxendale," she said, in easy English. "I didn't expect to meet another American in these wilds — and have him talk French to me!" Wherewith, she retraced her steps to where her companion had been awaiting her during this colloquy, leaving him somewhat taken aback over the discovery that she was a countrywoman of his, but none the less overjoyed at the initial success of his ultimate scheme for getting a glimpse of the princess.

. . . . . .

A long fortnight, quite fruitless until that moment, had passed since he had set forth from the other end of the empire for that remote principality, charged with the very delicate mission of finding out and reporting faithfully to a familiar friend of his whether its reigning princess seemed likely or not to suit in a matrimonial sense that friend's tastes and idiosyncracies: a mission such as, in times less matter of fact, would no doubt have been confided with all

proper pomp and publicity to a gray-bearded committee of state, which, in these drab days, could better be carried out, as between one modern young man and another, by a trustworthy chum whose tweeds and suit-case would surely attract less local attention than a train of knights in armor and cloth of gold; so that his principal would in no way be needlessly committed, could still stand down without hurt to either the lady's *amour propre* or his own.

It was not, as may be supposed, an errand that Baxendale would willingly have undertaken for anyone. But he had once in England all but brained His Highness of Jetland at polo, and they had ever since been fast as brothers by blood. He had just spent the pleasantest twelve months of his life as Prince Juric's guest in the wild frontier country ruled by that scapegrace under the ægis of his august uncle, the emperor. Throughout a long summer and winter, Juric and he had lived like David and Jonathan in that safely secluded corner of the vast empire, entirely content with the splendid sport of all sorts it afforded. He had learned to like the place and its people, and, at one time, he had even thought very seriously of settling down among them for good and all. But that and many other mutual plans had been knocked on the head when, one spring morning, there had come to the white palace among the mountains a message from the all-powerful emperor, to the effect that Juric of Jetland must forthwith woo and wed, for reasons of state sufficient for all concerned, a lady till then only known to him by her

name as the Princess Ingrid of Marque and the Lesser Isles. . . . And Baxendale could not very well have refused the first favor his friend had ever asked of him.

He had expected that it would prove a simple enough proposition to see sufficient of the princess for his purpose. And he had gone very quietly about the business that had brought him to Marque, asking no idle questions, such as might have attracted undue attention to his presence there at a season when visitors were almost unknown, contentedly biding his time. So, he had not known until he had spent some days in idling about its quaint little capital, sketch-book in hand, but always on the outlook for her, that she had left her palace there, betaking herself for a change of air to her summer villa on one of the minor islands that formed part of her realm.

But, having at length found this out, he had promptly followed her thither, only to be baffled again by the information that, while she was in residence, her extensive demesne was not to be trespassed upon, and that she trusted her neighbors, the fisher-folk among whom he had found lodging, to see that her wishes in this respect were properly observed. Had it been his own errand he was on, he would, as you will understand, have given it up at this point. But he had promised Juric of Jetland to carry the matter through to some definite conclusion, and was not, therefore, to be turned back by the risk of a snub, no matter how well deserved.

. . . . . .

The two girls came forward together after a brief consultation behind the sufficient screen of the branches about them, and Baxendale shot a single swift glance at the princess, and stepped forward toward her, bare-headed, eyes downcast.

"The Princess Ingrid," remarked her companion, in a tone of slightly malicious amusement, and stepped to one side, to inspect his rough sketch still more closely.

I lack that talent which could, perhaps, depict in type on this cold paper the Princess of Marque and the Lesser Isles as she appeared to him then. I must be content to let the printer set forth for your information — that you may picture her since I can not — that she was tall and very fair and admirably proportioned, with features sweetly serious at that moment and as perfect in repose as when her rare smile swept across them, eyes that held his for an instant so that he saw in them the dark depths of the sea and the warm, glad light of the sun, the distant mystery of the stars, no farther beyond his reach than was herself. For he knew, and at that moment for some intangible reason the knowledge had become hurtful to him, that the Princess Ingrid was of the oldest blood-royal in Europe.

She spoke, with a gracious kindliness, in a voice that thrilled some hitherto mute sense within him, as music sometimes will.

"Monsieur is an American — a countryman of Mademoiselle Rosewarne's — and an artist, *n'est-ce pas?* I shall esteem it an honor if he will consider

himself entirely free of the isle. We see too little of artists in Marque: our scenery is not so well known as it should be. But, no doubt, monsieur's work here will help to remedy that injustice."

Baxendale bowed again, inwardly furious because he thought he was blushing, and could almost feel the other girl's roguish glance at his face as she looked up from his easel.

"Your highness is more than kind," he returned. "But — I fear that my poor efforts will do very little to make such perfect scenery more widely known. I am, in fact, more of a portraitist than a landscape-painter." He hesitated, for a single second, and then shot a daring bolt, at random. "And, if at any time during my stay here your highness would condescend to give me a sitting or two, I think I could undertake in return that others of my craft would not be long in making for Marque."

The princess regarded him gravely, and then her face lighted up a little. She was only a young girl after all, and the compliment could not but please her.

"Does monsieur mean to remain for some time?" she asked simply, and he drew a breath of relief that he had not offended her by his boldness.

"I have no particular plans," he told her, "but, since I have your highness's forgiveness for the trespass I have committed — I came along the coast from the village by boat and landed at the mouth of a little stream not far from here — I should like very

much indeed to make some more sketches about the island."

"Monsieur is most welcome," she declared, a little indifferently he thought, and, without answering further his other suggestion, turned to glance at the sketch he had just begun.

"You are something of an impressionist, aren't you, Mr. Baxendale?" her companion asked, with a great assumption of innocence, her forehead wrinkled as if in an effort to understand the bent of the hasty outlines.

But it was the princess who replied, and in perfect English:

"You mustn't form any opinion on unfinished work, Noreen." And, with a little inclination of her proud head to the artist, she linked an arm in one of the other girl's, and led that laughing mischief-maker away with her.

Baxendale followed them with his eyes — and a very pleasing picture the two of them made, moving arm-in-arm up the path among the slender, sun-kissed silver-birches, which were not more graceful than they. A twist of the path took them out of his sight, and still he stood motionless, listening to the light music that came floating back on the breeze to his ears. He laughed, too, to himself, but low and a little shame-facedly. Then, he turned to his work again, and sat down at his easel in earnest. He felt that he must make good his footing there, and that could be best done by proving that he was

neither a mere amateur of the brush, nor yet an impostor.

Time passed unheeded, while he concentrated all his powers on the canvas before him. When he, at length, rose stiffly to stretch his cramped limbs, and scan with a keenly critical eye the result of his labors, he was not altogether dissatisfied with it. He had promised himself a pipe at this juncture, but some possible improvement suggested itself to his mind. He took off his coat, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, and sat down again, palette on thumb.

The mid-day sun was hot overhead, but he was absorbed in his occupation, and not till it had been descending from the zenith for nearly an hour did he allow himself another moment's relaxation. Even then, he would no doubt have worked on without relief, had not he once more heard light footsteps in his near neighborhood, but from landward on this occasion.

That sound preluded the appearance of a pretty, shy-eyed maid, in cap and apron, with a message for him from the princess. Mr. Baxendale was bidden to luncheon with her highness, at two o'clock.

Mr. Baxendale smiled contentedly to himself as she tripped off again to report his grateful acceptance of her highness's gracious invitation, and he was still smiling when, a little later, he reached the villa, by the simple process of following the path. He had produced at least a creditable piece of work, and, with that to support his pretensions, was better prepared to cope even with Miss Rosewarne.

Her highness's summer villa was a charming place, an unpretentious, but roomy, dwelling of warm red sandstone, with a belt of dark green firs for background and a wonderful view of the sea from its open front. He passed through a sheltered rose-garden, across a trim lawn, and on the doorstep was met by the maid, who had brought him the princess's message.

Noreen Rosewarne received him when he was presently ushered into the drawing-room, and introduced him to a very pleasant and young-looking matron, whom she addressed as the Countess Considine. The princess appeared as Miss Rosewarne was begging him to bring in his picture.

He brought it in, and was well pleased by the impression it evidently produced, for he thought that with this there could be no more question of his good-faith. Nor was there, for, after luncheon — a leisurely, informal function, during which, thanks in no small degree to his own *aplomb* and Noreen Rosewarne's vivacity, they had all become much better acquainted — the princess remarked laughingly that, if he were still desirous of painting her portrait as he had proposed, she would willingly give him a sitting or two.

"Come and see my own workshop," she said, and led the way to a luxuriously appointed studio, which, Baxendale could see, had at one time been a billiard-room. An unfinished head, in oils, at once caught his attention. It was Noreen Rosewarne, and that young woman regarded him with a piquant, pro-

vocative smile as he surveyed it with evident approval. For the artist had caught her spirited, willful expression to a nicety, and a very bewitching picture indeed she made.

"But I'm not going to be left out in the cold now," she cried. "I don't see why we shouldn't have both portraits in progress at once. I'll pose here"— she pirouetted across the room, a whirl of white petticoats and slender, twinkling ankles, threw herself into a chair —"and, while the princess is making my features famous, Mr. Baxendale can be doing his best for hers."

The princess looked whimsically at Baxendale, and he, smiling back at her, nodded assent to this very ingenious suggestion. So, she sat down at her easel, and he soon settled himself where he could best catch the perfect profile as she bent over her work. The countess kept them company for a time, and then, satisfied that all would be well with them, went off on some plausible excuse to have her accustomed forty winks after luncheon.

Baxendale had already gathered that she and the girls were living alone there, with a modest staff. The princess, who had for the present discarded all state and ceremony, was sharing a real girl's holiday with her American friend. And the soul he set himself to embody on his blank canvas was that of the real girl.

The afternoon passed with tremendous rapidity, so far at least as Baxendale was concerned, and, when dusk drew near, he excused himself. He felt

that he had made sufficient progress for this first day.

"You will come again — to-morrow?" the princess asked, as she and Noreen Rosewarne sauntered through the hall with him on his way to the door.

"To-morrow forenoon, if that will suit you," he ventured, and so departed, carrying with him his box of colors and the canvas he had just covered. And, as he walked through the darkling woods to his boat, he sang softly to himself.

The wind had died down, and it was late before he could reach the village, but the pretty Truda had waited up to make sure that he should not starve when he did arrive. She was ready to scold him, too, for his carelessness in having gone off for so long without any adequate provision of such creature comforts as a man requires.

"But you've been seeing our princess," she said, with that simple frankness which characterizes the islanders, "and so the time passed, eh? She has sent word that you are to be free of all the isle — or father would have been ill-pleased with you for trespassing on her estate." He answered her absent-mindedly. "I do believe you're in love with her already," said Truda, shrewdly. "But never mind! No one here will blame you for that."

He sat smoking by the fire for a time, after she had gone off to bed, and once his lips moved:

"Am I — already?" he asked himself, but apparently he could not answer that simple question.

. . . . . .

Baxendale turned in his sleep, and groaned. He was no longer in the happy Principality of Marque and the Lesser Isles, but back among the rugged peaks and crags and cliffs of Jetland. Juric had ridden out from the palace to meet him at the top of the Pass, and was almost uproariously glad to see him again. And even the taciturn mountaineers of the prince's escort had greeted him with a cheer that brought a lump to his throat.

At the palace gates, the guard turned out as they entered, and within the open doorway, at a little distance, was hovering the ubiquitous Ernst Coicu, who had most certainly seen to it that there was a good fire in the gun-room, with something to slake the traveler's thirst after the long day in the saddle. The sumpter-horses came clattering into the courtyard, and his baggage was carefully carried indoors.

"Bring that case through to the gun-room," he told a servant, and followed Juric thither.

"Have a stein," the prince advised, "to take the stiffness out of your tongue. And, then, tell me what she's like." His tone was eager.

But Baxendale did not answer at once. He was busy, opening the small, flat, wooden packing-case a servant had just laid on the table before him. From this, he took two canvases, portraits both, and placed these silently in Juric's hands. One was a faithful copy of his picture of the princess, the other a very spirited likeness of her American friend. The princess had made him a gift of the latter when he had at last left Marque.

For some time, Juric studied one of them, silent also. At the other, he had glanced for only an instant. And, then:

"That's the girl I'm going to marry," said he. "For heaven's sake, Bolter," he cried, "don't tell me I haven't chosen the right one! I can't change my mind, you know. It's too late now. Wake up, man! Tell me which is which — and who the other may be. Wake up, you old graven image! — wake up!"

. . . . . .

And Bolter Baxendale awoke.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

HE felt cold, and a little cross. He had a bad taste in his mouth. "Confound the whisky they keep here!" he muttered, and opened his eyes, and stretched himself, and yawned, and looked about him — and suddenly raised himself on one elbow, surprised beyond expression, wide-wake. For he was not in the same room where he had fallen asleep in an arm-chair before his fire. He was lying among many cushions, on a soft and comfortable couch, within a curtained alcove, which formed part of a long, spacious chamber, such as in a palace might have been a hall of audience, gorgeously appointed and furnished.

From its ornate, frescoed ceiling hung enormous chandeliers of pure cut-crystal. A ray of sunlight from one of the lofty, lace-draped windows opposite his alcove set them scintillating so that their prismatic radiance almost dazzled him. It was reflected in apparently innumerable mirrors. He looked down at a floor of polished parquetry, and, setting his feet tentatively on it, stood up, a little giddy, and took a cautious step or two.

At one end of the chamber, on a crimson-covered dais, under a velvet canopy of the same color, stood an elaborately carved and gilded chair of state, and others of the same design, but smaller, were set at intervals against the costly paneling between the mirrors and the windows. From the dais, a wide pathway of crimson carpet led to the further end of the chamber, where heavy velvet curtains hid a double doorway, the only apparent entrance. The four square corners had been transformed into bowers of tropical blossoms, as if in anticipation of some ceremonial occasion.

For a time, Baxendale could do nothing but gaze dazedly about him. His mind was still in a maze, so vivid had been his dream. He could not conceive how he came to be there, wherever it was. He felt sure he must still be dreaming. For even his own identity seemed to have undergone some strange and startling transformation. He crossed the polished floor, somewhat stiffly, and, making toward a window, saw a familiar figure approaching him from a distance, a puzzled frown on its face.

His own features lighted up in glad recognition, and, at the same moment, the other's eyes met his with a quick, warm smile, hand outstretched in haste to grasp the hand he held out.

"Hello! Juric," he cried delightedly, hurrying forward, a dozen eager questions on the tip of his tongue, and struck his knuckles sharply on the plate-glass of the mirror at which he had arrived.

The image therein drew back, stared at him,

aghast. And its lips also moved as he stammered, under his breath:

"What — what the devil's the meaning of everything! Have I gone mad — or is this all a nightmare? But how can it be! I can hear myself speaking. I'm wide-awake, anyhow."

He gazed fixedly for some time at the man in the mirror, a dashing, debonair cavalry soldier, in a uniform that became him immensely. A frogged dolman set off his square shoulders, and his blue tunic with its gold facings fitted him like a glove. The varnished knee-boots below his smart braided breeches were obviously the work of an artist. His heavy mustache and trim hair almost matched in color the golden spurs at his heels. A scar that might have been a sword-cut over one temple added something of distinction to well-favored, aquiline features, which spoke of exposure to sunshine and wind and rain. He was, in short, as perfect a specimen of the *beau sabreur* as might be found among half a dozen armies. And he was gazing fixedly back at Bolter Baxendale, with dumbly astonished eyes; his lips moved again, as Bolter Baxendale spoke:

"I'll be damned," said he, "if you aren't Juric of Jetland. And — I'm you!"

The man in the mirror had seemingly no reply to make to these emphatic remarks. He disappeared for the moment as Baxendale, looking wildly about him, caught sight of a bell-push, and, making for it,

STRUCK HIS KNUCKLES SHARPLY ON THE PLATE GLASS OF THE MIRROR

put all his weight to the button. The uncanny silence was beginning to get on his nerves.

From an unexpected doorway in the paneling at one side of the dais, a most respectable-looking, middle-aged man with mutton-chop whiskers appeared in a hurry. He was wearing a full-dress black livery, not unlike a butler's, and might have been an old-fashioned family servant. In one hand, he was carrying a silver salver with a coffee-service, and in the other what looked like a small baton or scepter. Under one arm, he had tucked a long saber with inset scabbard and jeweled hilt.

Baxendale glared at this fresh apparition, which he had at once recognized. He had seen it often enough in that happy past of which he had been dreaming so vividly. It was Ernst Coicu, body-servant, factotum and faithful slave to that scapegrace, Juric of Jetland. And it was bending nearly double before the bewildered Baxendale, in spite of its burdens.

"What the blazes is the meaning of all this tomfoolery?" was the first and not, perhaps, unnatural question that gentleman put to it, using the *patois* as had been his custom in Jetland, although Ernst spoke English and half a dozen other languages equally well. But its expression as it stood upright again, evidently casting about in its mind for the proper reply, was one of pained patience.

"Your bell has just rung, highness," it declared, as if in deprecation of further fault-finding. "I

answered it on the instant. You told me not to bring you coffee till you should ring."

Baxendale looked still more wrathfully at the apparition, and a bright idea occurred to him. He poured himself out a cup of coffee, and, without pausing even to put in sugar, swallowed it. Its bitter flavor finally convinced him that he had done with dreaming, and he regarded Ernst no less severely in consequence. But he knew that it would not help him to let his very natural annoyance get the better of him before he had found out all he wanted to know: and he wanted to know a great deal.

"Whose service are you in now?" he inquired in a slightly less-irascible voice, and Ernst raised his eyebrows as one who implores high heaven to help him in his extremity.

"I am in your service, highness," the man answered, his tone almost a reproach.

"Don't call me highness," snapped Baxendale. "You know very well who I am, don't you, now?"

"Yes, prince," Ernst assured him, with aggravating finality; and Baxendale felt strongly tempted to kick the fellow out of the room. But he still restrained himself.

"What's all that tinware for?" he asked querulously, pointing to the sword and scepter.

"You have perhaps forgotten, highness, that you are to receive this morning the gentlemen of your suite, who arrived last night. Seeing you were asleep, I made bold to inform them that you were

engaged. They are awaiting your highness's pleasure in the anteroom."

Baxendale turned on his heel, with a stifled ejaculation. Then, he faced Ernst again.

"Show them in," he ordered, "and look sharp about it. You're evidently stark mad."

"Yes, your highness," returned Ernst, and quailed for a moment before the fierce light that had leaped into Baxendale's usually impassive eyes. "Yes, prince," he improved upon it. "If your highness will condescend to buckle on your sword, and be seated —"

Baxendale hesitated, uncertain, then snatched the sword from the man, buckled it on, twirled the scepter once or twice in his fingers, took another look at himself in one of the mirrors, and sat down without demur on the canopied chair at that end of the room. Ernst retired as expeditiously as he had appeared, and, presently, the folding doors facing the solitary occupant of the long chamber were drawn noiselessly apart, the curtains hooked back by a couple of gorgeous footmen, and Ernst was again visible in the opening. He had thrown about his shoulders a heavy gold chain of office, evidently with the idea of adding all due dignity to his temporary discharge of the duties of chamberlain.

A crimson screen cut off all view of the interior of the anteroom. From one side, there suddenly stepped in front of the screen a short, stout, elderly gentleman, very red in the face, mustached, wearing

spectacles, who would undoubtedly have been more comfortable in both body and mind but for the pomp and panoply of full court-dress, in which he had thought fit to array himself. And he stood stock-still there, blinking.

"His Excellency, the Baron Carquois," Ernst announced in the sonorous French of ceremony, and the baron, having bowed very low, advanced toward the dais, turning out his toes much more than was necessary, followed at a respectful distance by the assiduous Ernst, who, Baxendale recollected amusedly, had always been a great stickler for all such points of etiquette. The baron's puffy cheeks and protuberant eyes gave him the appearance of one who whistles surprisedly. He bowed again as he halted before the dais, and the effort left him redder still in the face.

Baxendale knew the guest quite well by sight: they had been mutually uninterested fellow-passengers on the *Mauretania* — and, in his hurry to come to some understanding of these complications, he rose and stepped down from the dais.

"How do you do," he said, and held out his hand, in response to a tentative gesture on the baron's part, when, to his infinite annoyance, the other, stooping over it, touched it lightly with a brush-like mustache. He drew back and sat down again, scowling at the Baron Carquois. Ernst had returned to his post at the distant doorway.

"Now, look here!" Baxendale began in a very ominous voice, and paused. The baron seemed to

be scratching his back, and with unusual vigor. But as it immediately appeared, the stout little man was merely waving a surreptitious hand behind him as a signal, no doubt prearranged, to Ernst. And, as if in response to this signal, another individual had presented himself in front of the crimson screen with a promptitude that was somewhat disconcerting.

"Mr., the Professor Jocrisse," Ernst proclaimed him, and Baxendale eyed a little doubtfully the newcomer, who, having bowed with the awkwardness of an automaton, came striding up the carpeted pathway toward the dais. He was an enormous man. Tall though Baxendale was, the professor overtopped him by inches, and in the matter of girth and breadth would easily have made two of him. Beside this giant, the Baron Carquois looked ludicrously like a dwarf.

This visitor was garbed in a professional frock-coat, far too tight for him. His loose patent-leather boots occupied an appreciable area of the floor-space. His hands, at the ends of unduly long arms, matched his feet as regarded size. His spectacled features were not unamiable, but exceedingly ugly, and a pair of extremely bushy eyebrows, in constant motion, surmounted by an untidy mop of hair, helped to give him something of the appearance of a performing gorilla. He seemed to have an unfortunate habit of clearing his throat frequently, to the absolute stupefaction of all in his neighborhood: of which accomplishment he forthwith favored Baxendale with a fair sample.

"Deuce take it!" objected Baxendale, recovering by degrees, and almost laughing in spite of himself at the baron's disgusted expression. "Deuce take it, sir! Why don't you stand a little further away? You've nearly deafened me."

But the professor's eyebrows had jumped almost to the top of his head, and the baron, also, was looking as blank as he no doubt felt. It was evident that neither of them knew English.

"Listen, then," said Baxendale in their own language, and instantly regretted that he had not stuck to French or German, that he had confessed to any knowledge of the local tongue. It was too late then, however, to remedy that slip, and he went on. "There's some silly mistake about this business. I don't know whom you take me for — though I suppose it must be His Highness, Prince Juric — but, anyhow, I'm not —"

The professor held up a prodigious hand, and, stepping on to the dais in a single stride, lifted one of Baxendale's by the wrist, pulled out his watch, and calmly proceeded to take that now thoroughly incensed individual's pulse.

"Let go, confound you!" expostulated the patient, and he made a violent effort to free himself. But he was quite impotent in the giant's grasp, and, curbing an almost irresistible impulse to knock some of the professor's teeth down his throat, allowed the completion of the investigation before protesting further.

"His highness is inclined to be feverish," Pro-

fessor Jocrisse informed the Baron Carquois, and the baron looked properly depressed. "But, nevertheless, his state of health need not, I think, prevent you from acquainting him with our mission here." He spoke precisely, but in a voice that reminded Baxendale of a bassoon.

"Your highness," the Baron Carquois began in a soothing tone, before Baxendale could cut in again, "I have the honor to bring you greeting from his royal and imperial majesty, our master, the emperor. I am the bearer of a brief private message by word of mouth from his royal —"

"Out with it, then. Never mind the rest," urged Baxendale, who was in no mood to listen to any vain repetition of titles, and saw that until the little man was safely delivered of his embassy nothing else need be expected of him. "Out with it! But, remember, I've warned you that I'm not Prince Juric — if that's who the message is for. My name's —"

Professor Jocrisse once more held up a portentous hand, and the reverberations of his great voice once more drowned all lesser sounds.

"Hear him," he urged, indicating the Baron Carquois with a twist of one thumb and a downward slant of the eyebrows.

"His royal and imperial majesty," the Baron Carquois repeated, while Baxendale lay back limply in his chair, "has commanded me to inform your highness that any further rash disregard of his royal and imperial majesty's expressed wishes will

render your highness liable to a life-sentence of exile, and forfeiture of all rank, title and estates at present held by your highness within the bounds of the empire. His royal and imperial majesty has, indeed, already decreed that such sentence shall automatically come into effect should your highness be so ill-advised as to enter into any contract of matrimony with that — with that painted lady — I am but employing the phrases with which I was charged by his royal and imperial majesty — that painted lady whose portrait has hung in your highness's palace for some time past — in fact until your highness left home a fortnight ago."

"Now, how the devil did his royal and imperial majesty find all that out!" Baxendale wondered inwardly, and scarcely heard the rest of the rigmarole quoted to him. "I thought Juric would have had sense enough not to give the show away to his august uncle. He seems to have got himself into the deuce and all of a tangle. What a fool I was to give him his choice of the two pictures! And, yet, I'd never have believed he could be so blind."

"His royal and imperial majesty," the baron went on interminably, "desires that your highness will henceforth avail yourself of the services of the suite chosen for your highness by his royal and imperial majesty, which I am now to have the privilege of presenting to your highness."

Baxendale laughed aloud. He could almost imagine how the irrepressible Juric would have received such a company, and, laughing, he forgot for

the moment his own extraordinary predicament. But he caught Professor Jocrisse's eye, and that sobered him.

"Trot 'em in," he requested, earnestly hoping that among the suite he might find someone with sufficient intelligence to confide in, and once more the professor's eyebrows shot skyward while the baron puffed and blew. They had heard many almost unbelievable stories of the eccentric young prince whom they had been dispatched to safeguard against himself, but were evidently finding fact stranger still than fiction. The baron signaled to Ernst again, and instantly that acting-conjuror produced before the screen in the distance a gentleman very gorgeous in blue and gold, whom he announced as Rear-Admiral Agassiz.

The gallant admiral, having made his bow, advanced, bowed again, and kissed hands. He seemed to be a sailor who knew a good port when he came across one, thought Baxendale, judging him by the cut and color of the most prominent feature in his figurehead, and promptly decided that a bottle-nose was not to be taken as indicating any excess of brain-power.

"Major-General Mandarin," represented Ernst in his most pompous tone, as that pompous-looking veteran made his appearance, and marched forward at parade-step, chest and chin well up, elbows on waist, sword-scabbard in hand at an angle absolutely correct. He rather reminded Baxendale of a martinet at West Point under whose eagle eyes he himself

had once been wont to feel somewhat faded and worn. And he did not augur any great gain to himself from Major-General Mandarin's company.

The next comer, also in uniform, was Captain Castrique, a much younger man, but no less apparently filled with a sense of his own importance. Him Baxendale remembered having noticed on board the *Mauretania,* and having disliked at sight. His close-set, cold gray eyes and thin lips spoiled a face that otherwise might have been more than passably good-looking. He made a smart figure in his scarlet regimentals, but the fact that he turned his toes in as he walked spoiled this effect, also. His habitual expression was supercilious, to the verge of insolence, and Baxendale received his perfunctory salute with a frown.

Another self-satisfied exquisite followed, a young man also, pallid of features, very correct in court-dress, heralded by Ernst as the Count Van Hoytema. The count was carefully waxed and curled and scented. He might perhaps have made a popular dancing-master at a girls' school, but Baxendale could find no use at all for him, as he came mincing up the crimson pathway from before the screen, at his most affected gait.

The count, having made due obeisance, stepped to one side.

"Is this the lot?" Baxendale demanded of the Baron Carquois. The baron bowed assent, and Ernst let fall again the curtains that covered the doorway. "Then, just listen to me for a minute,

the lot of you," Baxendale continued. "Do any of you speak English?" They shook their heads comprehensively, and he went on in their own tongue. "His Excellency, the Baron Carquois, and also Professor Jocrisse, will bear me out when I say that I've done my best to prevent you all from making a monumental mistake, and, before it goes any further, you may as well take my word for it that I'm not —"

He stopped, glaring at Professor Jocrisse, who had suddenly interrupted by the expedient of clearing his own throat at inordinate length and with an uproar like a salvo of cannon. The others regarded one another disgustedly. They had been prepared to listen politely, although with absolute unbelief, to any statement the prince might make, and were even mildly curious to hear what he might have to say for himself. But for their guidance in dealing with him they had specific instructions from the emperor himself, who had especially warned them against allowing his highness to get rid of them by any pretext, no matter how plausible.

"What in blazes is that for?" Baxendale asked irritably, as the professor extended to him an enormous paw, containing what looked like an infinitesimal white pill.

"Your highness had better take one every two hours," the professor informed him. "They will help to allay the excitement under which your highness is laboring."

"I wish somebody would help me to lay you out!" Baxendale retorted, explosively. "Why don't you

take 'em yourself, for that infernal cough of yours? Do me the favor to choke it down till I've got these gentlemen to understand that I'm not —"

"Your highness will be so good as to swallow this tabloid," Professor Jocrisse insisted in his great voice, and, as Baxendale perforce paused again, to look balefully at him, the Baron Carquois ventured to intervene.

"Professor Jocrisse holds his appointment, as physician extraordinary to your highness, at the hands of his royal and imperial majesty," he murmured. "Professor Jocrisse is personally responsible to his royal and imperial majesty for your highness's return in sound health."

To save further argument, Baxendale snatched up and swallowed the tabloid, gulping it down with several sound Anglo-Saxon expletives. The professor retired two paces, and Baxendale got to his feet.

"Now, I've had more than enough of this farce," said he, determined to end it, once and for all, "and you may as well believe me when I tell you I'm —"

"Mr. Baxendale, of New York," proclaimed Ernst from the doorway, where he had been in communication with someone behind the curtains, and looked toward the dais as if for directions.

Baxendale had started galvanically at the sound of his own name. The others were scowling over their shoulders at Ernst, but Ernst had eyes only for him.

"Show Mr. Baxendale in," he ordered with a grim smile, "and look precious sharp about it."

CHAPTER FIVE

WHO'S WHO IN NEW YORK

"GEE WHIZ, prince!" cried a hearty voice, as Ernst obediently threw the doors wide. And there came hurrying in a tall, dark, sun-tanned young man, in a quiet, but very well-cut, suit of gray tweed, hat in hand, a light overcoat over one arm.

The pleasant, if ordinarily somewhat impassive, features were lighted up by a smile of very genuine pleasure. He took no notice at all of the distinguished gathering about the dais, but thrust through it, pushing to one side Captain Castrique who was in his way, extending a sinewy hand to his namesake; who, on his part, was regarding his visitor with an expression in which were mingled amazement, amusement, gladness and indignation. For the intruder, clean-shaven, in Bolter Baxendale's clothes, further distinguished by the curious tuft of white hair on his forehead, which was one of Bolter Baxendale's most noticeable hall-marks, aping Bolter Baxendale's manner as well as he might, would have passed almost anywhere for Bolter Baxendale.

"Gee whiz, prince!" he cried again. "This is great!"

Without further consideration, the true Bolter Baxendale seized the new arrival by the hand, and wrung it warmly; for he counted this reckless impostor one of his closest friends. Thunderstruck though he was by the sheer audacity of the other's impersonation, he forgot for the moment all else in welcoming him.

"This is great!" ejaculated the newcomer, heedless of the overt disapproval with which the gentlemen of the suite were regarding him. It was self-evident that they did not at all approve of his pronouncedly democratic demeanor. "I only arrived from Europe myself a couple of days ago, and put up here quite by chance. My man told me this morning that you had come in last night, so I just jumped out of bed, and came round to say hello. It's like old times to see you again. What have you been doing with yourself, since I saw you last, eh? I never thought they'd have allowed you to stray so far from home, or I'd have asked you long ago to look us up in America. But you're doing very comfortably here, I can see. Who's all this crowd? I don't seem to recognize 'em. Introduce me a little, won't you?"

Baxendale, still divided between amusement and indignation, did not quite know what to do for the best. But a swift, urgent glance of appeal from his friend induced him to postpone, for a little at any rate, the inevitable *dénoûment*. Perhaps, he felt, too, that he owed the Baron Carquois and his fellows some slight return on his own account for the an-

noyance they had caused him. He could scarcely keep his face, however, while he presented his prototype to one after another of them, and observed the effect with which that incorrigible scapegrace greeted each, in execrable French. They received, with cold unconcern, his purposely ungrammatical, but very cordial, expressions of pleasure on making their acquaintance, and they did not respond at all to his friendly advances.

"What a bull in a china shop is this Baxendale fellow!" Count Van Hoytema remarked in an angry aside to Rear-Admiral Agassiz, having just received from the object of that remark a resounding slap on his most rheumatic shoulder. And Captain Castrique's face expressed anything but pleasure as he hopped behind Professor Jocrisse to save his tight patent-leather boots from being trodden upon again.

Ernst intervened very opportunely again at that moment. "Your highness's breakfast is served," he informed Baxendale, with imperturbable gravity.

"Have you breakfasted yet?" Baxendale asked his double. "No? Then, you'll join me. Ernst, see that a second cover is set at once.

"And you, gentlemen," he remarked graciously to the others, imitating very successfully the tone he had heard the prince use on such occasions, "are meantime excused from further attendance on us."

They bowed and followed him decorously to the anteroom, where before the fire a table was set for two; and then filed through to the room adjoining, all except Professor Jocrisse.

"What's that fat lobster lingering for?" the guest demanded. "Doesn't he know enough to do what he's told?"

Baxendale put that question, a little less abruptly perhaps, to the professor, and the professor cleared his throat so that the cups on the table rattled.

"His majesty most particularly commanded me," explained the professor in his most portentous voice, "not to lose sight of your highness for a single instant."

"The devil he did!" said Baxendale; and, to his companion: "What do you think of that, eh?" And they both fell to laughing. So contagious was their unrestrained mirth that even Ernst, standing guard at the door again, relaxed his tried official gravity so far as to smile. Only the professor, who had not understood what was said, looked glum, and was very evidently inclined to take inward umbrage.

"Get rid of him somehow," advised the visitor, having recovered himself. "Promise him you won't run away within the next hour or two, if he'll let us have the breakfast-room to ourselves. The others are feeding next door. He can join them there, and still keep an eye on you according to orders."

Baxendale put that politely to the professor. The professor, too, was hungry. The arrangement proposed met with his approval, and, having received from Baxendale a solemn promise not to abscond during his temporary withdrawal, he lumbered off to join his associates in anathematizing the cause of their general discomposure.

Ernst had taken upon himself to dismiss the attendant footmen, and, having seen to it that everything was in order, also disappeared, in obedience to a nod from Baxendale. Thereat, Baxendale plunged at once into an infinity of most urgent questions, which he had with difficulty suppressed till then.

"What the deuce is the meaning of everything?" he demanded, impatiently. "What are you doing here? How has all this happened? You've put me into a most ridiculous position, Juric, with all those —"

"Hold on for a moment," the other adjured, and helped himself liberally to ham and eggs. "Hold on for a moment, and I'll soon make it all clear. You mustn't call me Juric either, you know. You're his highness at present, and I'm Bolter Baxendale. So, get the habit. Practice makes perfect, prince!

"Listen, now — and don't say a word till I've talked to you. Time's precious. Give me five minutes. I'm in a hurry to make the very most of my holiday."

His Highness of Jetland, you will have observed, was quite an ordinary young man in his manners and mode of speech, although he could on occasion assume a demeanor almost more than sufficiently dignified and exalted. But he had been educated at a public school in England, where he had learned a good deal more than Latin and Greek; and, if his time at Oxford had been very short, in consequence of some rash dispute, at least he had not acquired

there that listless assumption of personal superiority which sometimes handicaps a gownsman more than is needful in real life. He had found out at school, and had not since forgotten, that even a prince is not necessarily a better man than the son of a successful pork-butcher, for instance.

"The fact is, Bolter — prince, I mean," he went on between bites, "that I got absolutely fed up with my own society after you left me in the lurch. I felt too much like a rat in a trap, loafing about the palace alone and watching the hands of the clock go round. I knew it could not be long before his majesty would begin to get after me again about marrying the princess.

"Now, I don't want to have any words with the old duffer about it," he declared, speaking thus disrespectfully of one so very august, puissant and imperial that, even now he is dead, men still speak of him with bated breath as the purple emperor. "I don't want to have any words with him, but — I'm not going to marry the princess. If I can't marry whom I choose, I don't see that I need — Would you advise me to marry any woman at another man's bidding?" he asked, his face suddenly set and stern. But Baxendale had apparently no advice to offer him on that point. "At any rate," the prince continued somberly, "I got tired of Jetland, for the first time in my life. I wanted a change. I crossed the frontier into Germany, and spent a month with the Archduke of Saxe-Maritz. Then, I thought I'd remain outside his majesty's dominions long enough

to let him forget his matrimonial schemes for me, and I went on to Vienna. I was there for quite a while, and — whom do you think I saw one day in the *Prater?* The princess? *Tchk!* No, her friend. Just for a moment, you know, but I'll swear it was she. I couldn't have been mistaken.

"I tried to trace her, but it was too late. Before I could find out at which hotel she was staying, she had left — for America. And I went off back to Jetland, in a worse temper than ever.

"I wasn't any happier after that, as you may imagine. The picture you left me was all very well, but it wasn't any sort of a substitute for the girl herself. And I got so utterly miserable at last that, one fine day, I packed up, and played truant properly. I left my old chancellor in charge, skipped across Austria again to Trieste, incognito, and caught a Cunarder, which landed me here a couple of days ago. And I don't mind telling you that I've put in two pretty busy days since I landed.

"Of course, it didn't take my imperial uncle long to get on to my track. He soon found out all that was happening, and he talked to me by wireless all the way across the Atlantic. However, he wasn't much crosser about it than he need have been, and, in the end, he gave me his gracious permission to spend a whole blessed week incog. in this glorious land of liberty. I suppose he thought he might as well make the best of what he couldn't very well help, for I'd have made at least a week of it in any case.

"He didn't tell me, though, the old fox! that

he had shipped that infernal fellow Carquois and his friends across after me by the first fast steamer, to spoil everything, and, if Ernst hadn't caught sight of you in the corridor last night — while you were asking some pretty chambermaid the way to the elevator! — I don't know what I'd have done. I'd most probably have fled on to San Francisco. You came on the scene in the nick of time to save me from getting into more trouble, and, anyhow, I was most uncommonly glad to hear you'd turned up.

"I knew you wouldn't mind doing me a good turn, but I hadn't time to explain it all to you then, so I just told Ernst to put 'em off till the morning and fix things up —"

"He must have doctored my good-night drink," Baxendale interrupted indignantly, and Prince Juric nodded.

"That valet of yours upstairs is a villain," he mentioned, "but it was really that old rascal Ernst who arranged everything. And he's certainly made you up to the life, don't you think? All I've done has been to borrow this suit. It certainly suits me, eh? And that elegant mustache of yours I bought on Broadway late last night — Broadway's a startling sort of a street, isn't it?

"Ernst and his accomplice got you downstairs this morning before there was anyone else about. The other fellow thinks you went up as you are, and got very drunk. And I've been sitting before your fire since then, waiting for you to wake up. I hope you were comfortable on your couch. Anyhow, you've

played your part splendidly. It was lovely to listen to the reception you gave your suite. I couldn't have beaten that. I was in the room behind you all the time, with one ear at the keyhole. And, now, you know more or less how things stand at the moment. So, you may as well chip in with some account of yourself. Where have you been, and what have you been doing with yourself since you deserted me among the mountains? I didn't take that at all kindly of you, especially when I thought of the good times we might still have had, if you had bought that hunting-box and settled down, as you used to speak of doing."

Baxendale's eyes clouded. He had never told, and he felt that even now he could not tell, his friend the real reason why he had given up the idea of settling down anywhere in the world.

"Oh, I've been knocking about as usual," he answered indifferently, "getting through time and money. From your place, I went over to Monte Carlo, and made a bit there. Then, I tried Paris for a month or two, and afterward was in London again. I felt dull, too, after the splendid time I'd had in your country, and I thought I'd take a run across here to see what had happened while I was away. It's some years, you know, since I left home."

"But you haven't any relations in New York, have you?" the prince asked.

Baxendale shook his head.

"Not one within a thousand miles of us," he returned. "And, from my cousins' point of view, a

thousand miles is near enough. They're very orthodox people, and have always held up their hands in horror of me and my mode of life. As far as they are concerned, I'm a homeless man and a wanderer: and they have no dealings with such."

"Pass the marmalade," the prince requested, and said no more for a moment. Then: "How did I play my little part in that last scene?" he asked, laughingly. "I thought my entrance was very creditable."

Baxendale, too, could not help laughing.

"You were quite lifelike," he answered. "But you've managed to make me thoroughly unpopular with your suite."

"There's one good thing about those precious popinjays," said the prince: "they're all provincials, from the back of beyond. I fancy his majesty must have picked them for this particular job because they know nothing but what they see in the papers of what's going on at court, and may be trusted not to corrupt the court with any account of what happens here. That fellow Castrique wants his wings clipped, and Van Hoytema's a *petit-maître* of the most pernicious species. I don't half like the looks of your friend, the professor, either: he doesn't seem to have any sense of humor at all. Just listen to that! Isn't he the wild buffalo?"

The roar that had startled them undoubtedly came from Professor Jocrisse's throat. A moment later, the door between them and the room adjoining was

gently pushed open a little, and his shaggy head appeared in the opening. He was evidently determined not to be over-trustful.

"Chuck a plate at him," the prince advised hastily, but Baxendale, annoyed though he was at the interruption, which was also a reflection on his good faith, did not go so far. What struck the suspicious professor was simply a loaf of bread. "Good shot!" cried the prince approvingly as the door closed again.

"They came over on the steamer with me," Baxendale remarked. "But, of course, I had no idea at all it was you they were after. They didn't deign to exchange a word with anyone on board — at least, until the last day."

"And that's no doubt their one good point," the prince commented, indifferently. "They'll all be as close as oysters. Did you notice how old Carquois stammered over his majesty's impolite description of the princess's American friend — the painted lady? I think it must have been from a Frenchman I had discharged from my service that he found out I had her picture hanging about. And I feel sure that he knows her name perfectly."

"I suppose he's still as determined as ever that you shall marry the princess?" asked Baxendale, with assumed nonchalance, reaching for the coffee-pot.

"It's a boast of his that he never changes his mind," said the prince. "He seems to forget that two can play at that game — and I'll see him far enough before I marry anyone, except of my own

free will. If I could only find out where the other girl is at this moment, I'd ask her to marry me, prince or no prince, emperor or no emperor!"

Baxendale breathed more freely again. He knew that his own infatuation could bring him nothing but hurt, and yet — to have heard that the woman he adored, even from such a distance, was one day to be the wife of his friend, would probably have put an end to their friendship.

"It's to be hoped you won't find her, then," he remarked gravely, upon reflection, "and that, if you do find Miss Rosewarne, she'll absolutely refuse to listen to you. If she doesn't, she'll get you into a perfect sea of hot water. You heard the message his majesty sent you by that fat contortionist, Carquois."

"I've been hearing nothing else since I saw the Strait of Gibraltar astern of me," retorted the prince, stormily; "and I don't care a snap of my fingers for any such threats. If the worst comes to the worst, it would perhaps be the best thing that could happen for me. I'd be a free man. I could make a fresh start in life over here, and, I give you my word, I'd infinitely prefer that to playing a part in his majesty's puppet-show. He's made just such another hash of my cousin Ughtred's affairs — the prince imperial, you know — and I'll be hanged if I'm going to stand it!" He was evidently in absolute earnest for once in his life, and Baxendale regarded him doubtfully.

"I don't see how you can help yourself," he ob-

jected, and — most probably you'll never see Miss Rosewarne again. I've no idea who she is or where she belongs. America's quite a big place, and, cooped up here with that keeper of yours, not to mention the other five — who have no doubt orders to see that you don't slaughter him and cut loose — you don't stand much of a chance of —"

"But I'm not going to be cooped up here," asserted the prince in a tone of patient surprise. "You didn't use to be so dense, Bolter — but, of course, it may be the after-effects of the sleeping-draught that scoundrel, Ernst, mixed for you. Here, have a cigar. . . . I'm absolutely counting on you — don't you understand? — to do me a good turn. For the next few days, I'm going to be Bolter Baxendale, and you'll have an equally free hand as Juric of Jetland."

CHAPTER SIX

A FRIEND IN NEED

"YOU'LL have an equally free hand," said the prince impressively, and, since his friend's fingers seemed, on the contrary, to have become paralyzed, tossed that thunder-struck individual a cigar. Baxendale, hand extended in the empty air to where the cigar-case had been, was staring like one in a hypnotic trance.

The prince struck a match. "And it's all as easy as that," said he, puffing a white cloud from his lips. "You see, it isn't as if I had arrived in New York officially. I'm nobody here, and no one will worry you. Those dunderheads next door we've already fixed up: they'll swear till all's blue that you're me. In fact, all you'll have to do will be to amuse yourself as you like until I turn up again."

Baxendale blew a long, whistling breath.

"You're evidently quite mad!" he remarked lugubriously, having at last recovered the power of speech. "I'd do a great deal to oblige you, Juric, and you know that, but what I'm going to do now is to tell your keeper in there"— he nodded toward the room in which Professor Jocrisse and his companions

were breakfasting —" all about the fool trick you've played on him, and —"

" If you move, I'll make a bolt for it," the prince threatened, anxiously. " Wait a moment. Don't be so beastly impetuous! Surely, you wouldn't grudge a poor devil like me a few days of freedom in a long lifetime. It's a favor I wouldn't ask of anyone in the world but you, and, if you refuse it —"

It would be a waste of time to repeat here the specious arguments the prince employed in support of his preposterous proposition. For Baxendale's mind was as adamant against all of them, till at length, the prince said, unhappily, " All right, have it your own way. Leave me in the lurch again — although I've been absolutely counting on you — if you're afraid of a risk that exists only in your imagination." And this final appeal to his sporting instincts vanquished in a moment all Baxendale's innumerable misgivings as to the outcome of any such hare-brained expedient.

" It's the risk to you I'm afraid of — and you know that very well," he returned, wearily. " But, if I can't prevent you playing the fool, I suppose I must just — I'll do whatever you like in the matter, Juric, and, if trouble comes of it, I'll shoulder my share."

" You're the best sportsman I know, Bolter!" cried the prince ecstatically, jumping to his feet, his face flushed with anticipation, his eyes sparkling eagerly. " You don't know how much it means to

me to be free even for a few days. I'll never forget all you've done for me since —"

"Since I all but made an end of you with my polo-stick at Hurlingham. That was the first time we met, wasn't it? And, in return — Do you remember that day in Jetland when the she-bear had me in a corner among the rocks, all but down and out, with my magazine empty: and you came in to my rescue with only a knife. You hadn't even a fair chance of your life — let alone of saving mine, as you did. I owe you —"

"Smoke up," said the prince imperatively, and held out a lighted match. "I've no time to listen to your egregious yarns. I'm in no end of a hurry to get away. And, now, as to details? You'll take over all my effects just as they stand. How about yours?"

"Everything in my rooms is at your disposal, except — There's a small wooden box locked away in one of my trunks — I left my keys in a drawer on the dressing-table — that I'd like you to leave with the hotel-people in my name, along with anything else you won't want while you're moving about."

"How about your mail?" asked the prince.

"No one knows where I am, so there won't be any to speak of. But what shall I do with yours?"

"I'm in the same case as yourself. My only likely correspondent is his royal and imperial majesty, as that ass Carquois calls him. And he sticks chiefly to the wires. Ernst has the key of my cipher-code,

and you'll open everything that may come in. I want you to do that, whether it's wire or letter, so that you may know how to act for me. But, of course, you needn't answer anything. I never do."

"But you'll let me know where I can communicate with you," Baxendale stipulated. "Where are you going to make for first?"

The prince shook his head emphatically.

"I've no earthly idea," he answered. "And I'm not going to give you any account of my doings — till I return. You may trust me to turn up again by midnight of next Wednesday — that's the end of my week, worse luck! — and to act like the model of circumspection you are, as long as I stand in your shoes."

"If you show as little sense as I've just shown in agreeing at all to the exchange," said Baxendale doubtfully, "it won't take you long to ruin my reputation!"

"Don't worry about such a bubble!" the prince advised. "Just imagine me having the time of my life while you hold the fort for me here, and — have a good time yourself. Ernst will give you any little tips you may want about things in general, and I hope you'll make that suite of yours sweat for their living. If I were in your place, I'd very soon have that fellow Jocrisse sorry he was ever invented! So, now, all I want to make me perfectly happy is your solemn promise that you'll disclose our secret to no one in the world — at least, before I see you again. I

know you won't talk about it at anytime, but I'd feel safer if I were sure that it would rest between you and me — at any rate, while I'm you."

Baxendale made a wry face, but, upon reflection, could not foresee any likelihood of the need to divulge their secret: and he gave the promise required of him.

"That's everything, then," concluded the prince, in a tone of intense satisfaction, "and — I may as well be off, eh?"

He picked up his hat and coat, and Baxendale rose from the table. They shook hands without a word, but for a moment each looked into the other's eyes. Then, the prince turned, and left the room.

As the door closed, Baxendale took a step toward it, his lips parted as if he would have cried out; but no sound came from them. He sauntered slowly back to the table, head bent, looking dazedly at the cold cigar in his fingers. Having once more lighted it, almost of mechanical instinct, he sat down again to think over more at his leisure the strange situation in which circumstance had thus stranded him.

He could scarcely yet realize that he stood committed to his part in the crazy escapade contrived by the madcap prince to meet the exigency of the moment. Stretching out his feet toward the blaze on the hearth, and catching sight again of his boots and spurs, he stared vacantly for a time at these visible reminders of the rash rôle he had undertaken. A few months before, he reflected, he would have given the world for such a change, for the sake of standing in

Juric's shoes for even a few brief days. And now — He fell to wondering how that jade, Dame Fortune, would have dealt with him had he been the real Juric. Memory's fleet wings took him back to far-away Marque, and he walked for a space in a rose-garden there with a blushing, gray-eyed girl-princess, himself a prince.

The flaming coal in the grate collapsed with a crash. The fair face imagination had brought before him was no more visible. He sighed, in the bleak and empty present again — no better than an impostor, he told himself. He had no illusions as to his own prospects in so far as the Princess Ingrid might be concerned. He knew, and accepted for a matter of fact, what the modern romantic novelist will so seldom stop to consider: that a princess of the blood-royal may not fittingly mate with a mere gentleman. So, though he had been luckless enough to fall helplessly in love with a princess of the blood-royal, he had also been sufficiently sane and practical to have set some three thousand miles of sea betwixt her and himself.

Baxendale's mind turned to the future, which loomed no less blankly before him. He had no plans, and could conceive none at that moment. But he had to admit to himself that he was no worse off now than he had been overnight, and, as to the future, that must take care of itself. It was not his nature to anticipate trouble, and, recollecting how gladly the prince would have changed places with him for good, he finally solaced himself with the

sophism that he could not possibly have acted otherwise than he had, since, if he had left his friend in the lurch at this juncture, Juric would certainly have evolved some still more foolhardy scheme to attain his end.

"So, there's no earthly use in making myself miserable," he reminded himself, more briskly. "I'll get through the next few days all right, and then it will be time enough to tackle the question of my next move. What am I going to do at the moment?" He looked contemplatively at the stumps of the cigars he had smoked during his soliloquy, and then at the clock on the mantel. It was close on to one. "Humph!" said he. "I had no idea — I must get out of this fancy costume to start with, and then —"

He rang the bell, and presently Ernst appeared, carrying a card-tray. Professor Jocrisse took advantage of this opportunity to slip into the room, and seat himself at one side, as inconspicuously as possible.

"You're a most consummate scoundrel, Ernst," Baxendale informed that individual severely in English, ignoring the assiduous professor for the time being.

"Yes, highness," Ernst admitted, with a deprecating smirk.

"Has his high — Mr. Baxendale left the hotel?" Baxendale demanded, smiling in spite of himself.

"He left about half an hour ago, highness. Another gentleman has just called, and waits to know whether your highness will receive him."

Baxendale took up the two cards on the tray Ernst was extending toward him, and was not unnaturally surprised to find that one of them bore his own name, with the penciled words, in Prince Juric's writing: "To introduce a friend in need." On the other was printed, "Lester Burdick. Representing *The American Eagle.*"

Baxendale laughed amusedly. It was evident that Burdick had met the prince, who had with unfailing audacity fobbed him off with this introduction. And Baxendale was not quite sure what he should do. He himself had no wish to encounter Burdick at present, but, on the other hand, it might be wise to placate the newspaper man, and induce him, if that were possible, to refrain from giving publicity to the doings of Juric of Jetland.

Someone knocked at the door, while he was still cogitating, and the Baron Carquois was admitted by Ernst.

"Your highness," said the nobleman, his gooseberry eyes very big behind their glasses, "I am deputed to beg leave of absence for forty-eight hours, on urgent private affairs, for Count Van Hoytema and Captain Castrique."

"They can have leave of absence for forty-eight years," returned Baxendale carelessly, "as far as I'm concerned. I'm just going to change my clothes, baron. And all you gentlemen can get into mufti also, as soon as you like. These fancy-costumes of ours are rather conspicuous, don't you think?"

The baron bowed and withdrew.

"Better show Mr. Burdick in, Ernst," said Baxendale, and Ernst, also, disappeared.

A few minutes later, Burdick presented himself, somewhat grave of face.

"Your pardon, prince," said he abruptly, in no wise abashed by the splendid figure that confronted him, as Baxendale turned from the fireplace. "Your pardon, prince, for being so long. But I've just been having a few words with the gentlemen of your suite, and — I feel it my duty to warn you, too, with all respect, that they're bound to get into trouble here, if they persist in being so ultra-European in their ideas. This is New York, you know — not even the wild West they've probably seen in some traveling show — and dueling isn't considered the thing, at all. What's more, Mr. Baxendale is too good a sort to be made cold meat of while I've any say-so at police headquarters, and —"

"What are you driveling about?" Baxendale interrupted, exasperated by the long-windedness of his unsuspecting acquaintance. And, then, there flashed across his mind the application for leave of absence 'on urgent private affairs' he had just granted.

"Is it that infernal Castrique?" he demanded hastily.

Burdick nodded quick confirmation.

"Yes," said he. "He's got it all fixed up to fill your friend Baxendale full of lead, bright and early to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CHERRY IN THE COCKTAIL

HAVING bidden Baxendale good-bye, Prince Juric was in great haste to be gone, eager, as he had said, to make the utmost of his holiday. But some devil latent within him induced him to pause for a moment in passing through the anteroom, where the Baron Carquois and his companions were lingering about the breakfast-table with their cigars, to exchange a few pointed parting remarks with them.

It happened, unfortunately for all concerned, that the gentlemen of the prince's suite were not at that moment in the best of tempers. They had one and all felt slighted by the preference for the society of his free and easy acquaintance displayed by the supposed prince, and were not at all prepared to take in good part the badinage now bestowed on them by the self-assured interloper. More than one of them had considered himself personally affronted by that individual, and Captain Castrique felt impelled to call the offender to account for this somewhat too democratic and familiar behavior. He left his seat, and confronted the prince.

"Monsieur is not perhaps aware that his manners

are not such as obtain among gentlemen," he remarked in a very scornful tone, regarding the prince offensively out of his cold, close-set eyes.

"I'm not aware that monsieur is a judge of such matters," the prince retorted airily, in the mangled French he had adopted as an additional artifice and disguise.

Captain Castrique drew a deep, hissing breath.

"Monsieur means that I am no gentleman," he inferred, and the prince nodded politely. "And monsieur has trodden painfully on my feet," the captain declared, almost livid with anger.

"Big feet are no sign of breeding," suggested the prince provokingly, and Captain Castrique could scarcely restrain the impulse to spring at the young man's throat.

"I shall do monsieur the honor of running him through for his insolence," he said. "Count Van Hoytema will no doubt be so obliging as to arrange the matter for me." He sat down again, breathing fire and slaughter.

Count Van Hoytema approached the prince.

"Perhaps monsieur will favor me with the name of a friend," he requested, twirling fiercely an ineffectual mustache.

"You may call at the Waldorf this afternoon between three and four," the prince said, with the air of one conferring a favor. "Ask for me — and, meantime, good-morning to you."

He paused on the threshold to smile blandly back at them. He was merely amused by their helpless

indignation, and not in the least concerned over the consequences that threatened. Even the unfortunate fact that he had not a friend in New York to whom he could turn in this connection did not interfere with his present peace of mind. He had three hours yet ahead of him in which to make all his own arrangements. He was still smiling softly to himself when he reached Baxendale's rooms. Ernst had followed him thither, and they found the valet in the dressing-room, busy sorting out suits of clothes.

"My friend downstairs is all right again now," Prince Juric remarked as the man looked round, "except for a bit of headache. Don't say anything about the state he came home in, or how you two got him downstairs again."

"No, sir; certainly not, sir," the valet returned in a tone of virtuous protest, and pocketed promptly the note the prince whisked toward him between two fingers.

"And, now, get my things packed again. I'll give you ten minutes to do it in, and my friend's man will lend you a hand," said the prince. "Send them all downstairs, the moment they're ready. I'm going to pay my bill, and I'll be waiting for them below." He possessed himself of Baxendale's precious picture in its packing-case, and made off with it under one arm, leaving Ernst to make matters still more obscure to the valet.

The prince handed the picture over to the hotel-clerk for safe-keeping, and, having settled his bill, had not long to wait for his baggage. The bulk of

this, for which he would have no use, he left behind in storage, and the balance he dispatched to the Waldorf in charge of a smart messenger, who, in return for a liberal tip, undertook first to carry out his low-toned instructions exactly, and then to forget all about them. For the prince did not intend to leave any trail.

"Yessir," said the messenger, in a very audible voice for the benefit of any who might overhear, "I understand. I'm to take thim to th' Belmont, an' say that Mr. Baxendale'll be along by-an'-bye."

"Hope you haven't been dissatisfied here, Mr. Baxendale," said the clerk, "that you're leaving us for the Belmont."

"I'd just as soon have stayed on here," the prince hastened to assure the official, much gratified by the success of his little stratagem, "but — I've an engagement at the other place. I'll be back again, anyhow, before very long." And, having seen his baggage carried off in a cab, he stepped out into the sunshine on Fifth Avenue.

The sense of absolute liberty that was making all the blood in his veins tingle madly was perhaps the most irresistible emotion he had ever experienced. His few prior hours of freedom he had spent, as it were, at the end of a chain, with his heart always in his mouth. But, now, he had to restrain a wild impulse to shout and sing, to take every passer-by into his confidence, to explain to the world at large that for at least five glorious days he might — save for an insignificant affair of honor that would rob him of

only a forenoon — do anything and everything that he thought fit. He was almost intoxicated with the wonder of it.

The stir and bustle of Fifth Avenue were entirely in tune with his mood. He started down-town on foot, because in a cab he would have had to endure again the old, familiar, cooped-up feeling, and also because, although he could not but admit to himself the hopelessness of that tentative quest which had brought him to America, neither could he foretell whom he might, or might not, meet on the Avenue.

A traffic block at a cross-street delayed him for a few moments, and, somewhat to his inward alarm, a man among the crowd that had speedily gathered claimed his acquaintance.

"Hello, Mr. Baxendale," said the stranger, and "Hello, old chap," the prince returned with a friendly nod, calling all his wits to the encounter. "What's the best of your news?"

"Oh, nothing — since I saw you last: except — I'm very sorry about the mistake that fool linotype-man made in setting up my little yarn about your bet with R. Rufus Caffyn. I've no doubt he slipped in the extra 'o' by mistake to start with, and then thought the story would read just as well if he stuck to it. But my copy said twenty thousand as clear as daylight — not two hundred thousand. So, I don't want you to feel that I'm in the habit of cooking my figures."

"Of course not," the prince agreed heartily, although he had not the remotest idea as to what the

other, who was no doubt a reporter, referred. "I'd never have thought of blaming you for anything of the sort." And he made as if to move on.

But Baxendale's acquaintance had more to say yet.

"Say," said he. "You knew Prince Juric of Jetland pretty well on the other side, didn't you?"

"Pretty well," the prince answered as coolly as he could.

"Well, I'll tell you why I ask. I've just found out that all those high-fliers — the counts and barons and so on who crossed on the *Mauretania* with you — have put up at the St. Regulus. You registered there yourself. And I've just remembered noticing a couple of days ago the name of a Mr. Juric on the hotel books. Is that the prince?"

The point-blank question almost took Juric's breath away, but it was too late to evade the issue, and he did not hesitate.

"I'll tell you all about it, old chap," he said, "if you'll promise not to make use of anything I may say without the prince's permission. He's really a great friend of mine, you know, and I want him to have the best time possible over here, in his own way. He came across incognito a couple of days ago, and it will make him awfully sick if his little holiday's spoiled by the public finding out who he really is. I think the best thing I can do is to give you a card to him — I know I can trust you to act like a white man toward him for the few days he's still to be here."

With this diplomatic overture, the prince fished

from a pocket one of Baxendale's cards, scribbled a few words on it, proferred it to the newspaper-man, and, hastily shaking hands, excused himself on the plea of a pressing appointment.

"I think I managed that rather neatly," he told himself, as he went on his way. "And, now, Bolter must devise some scheme of his own to keep his friend from giving the game away." But, even while he could congratulate himself in this instance, he had no desire to meet any more of Baxendale's friends or acquaintances, and he wished, too late, that he had taken some less frequented route to the Waldorf, when, passing Sherry's, he walked almost into the arms of another and very ornate young man, who greeted him with effusive outcry.

"Well, you old prodigal! Here you are, eh? I was just wondering whether you'd remember to turn up at all — you were so grumpy last night. But come on in. Don't you want me to buy you a quiet cocktail before we sit down?"

All this, at the top of his voice on the busy sidewalk, attracted no little local attention. Before Juric could even protest, he had been propelled, almost by sheer force, into the vestibule of the restaurant. He made several attempts to break away, but his new friend would not be denied.

"You simply must," the youth asseverated, "and that's all there is to it. I don't care a tin tack about your other engagements — you had no business to make any after accepting my invitation. You've simply got to eat and drink and be merry with me;

so, forget all your other troubles for an hour or two."

He seemed to be a very masterful young man, and was obviously in exuberant spirits. It appeared that Baxendale had accepted his invitation to luncheon there and then. The prince, in Baxendale's place, perforce yielded, parted with hat and coat, and led the way without further argument, guided from behind by his host. But he regretted bitterly the weakness of will that had so involved him, when, having crossed a crowded room as unconcernedly as he could, he found himself in a moment the center of a gay group which, at sight of him, had risen from one of the tables and now hemmed him about so closely that he could not escape from among them.

A brisk and very bright-eyed young matron in gray-fox furs had possessed herself of one of his hands, a pretty girl of the other. Behind them, two other girls hovered, one smiling a warm welcome to him, the other more demure, but regarding him no less attentively than he was looking at her. At his back was his first assailant, supported by several waiters. For a moment or two, a perfect babel of greetings and explanations gave him time to think how he might best steer through such a difficult situation.

"Oh, lord! what a fix!" he groaned inwardly.

Outwardly, he, also, was smiling, debonair, quite at his ease.

"Yes, I only landed last night. I put up at the St. Regulus, but I've left there now. I was a bit tired and out of sorts when you met me." He an-

swered quickly the shower of questions they poured on him. "No, I haven't forgotten you, I can assure you: but I've been so long away everything seems different somehow. Give me time to get a look at you. I haven't forgotten, believe me."

"But it isn't more than a couple of months since Ethel and I met you sauntering down 'the shady side of Regent Street' as if London belonged to you," objected one of the girls in the background mischievously, "and I do believe you've forgotten all about that, at least."

"I wasn't talking to you at all," the prince countered desperately, "and you know that well enough. Of course Ethel and you are different." His quick eyes located Ethel at least as a result of that daring speech, and he looked again at the other girl behind her.

"It's Nesca you're trying to place then," said Ethel. "Let me introduce them, Mrs. Delancy. Miss Carteret — Mr. Baxendale — better known, I believe, for his sins, as 'Bolter'."

"Now, that's too bad, isn't it, Miss Carteret?" the prince protested, laughingly. "And I hope you won't allow yourself to be prejudiced against me by any such introduction. But — what? A cocktail? Most certainly. A dry Manhattan for me, please."

"And don't you forget the cherry!" bawled the other man of the party, after the retreating waiter to whom he had given his order. "Come on, now. Let's all sit down, and see about something to eat. I can talk as easily that way as any other."

The prince, thankful for this interruption, slipped into a chair beside Ethel, and was not slow to notice that she addressed the host as Oscar, when she took him to task for his trumpet-tones.

"But I wanted the man to hear me," argued that individual, quite unabashed, "and what would have been the use of whispering, eh? Besides, this is an occasion — but Bolter hasn't heard yet. Now, just give me a chance till I tell him — you girls really talk far louder than I do. Bolter, what we're all here to celebrate is my engagement to Lillian — and don't ever let me hear you call her Mrs. Delancy again! You may wear English clothes, if you like, but don't starch your American manners. Here's your cocktail. I've no doubt you're thirsty — so, drink to us."

"Health, wealth and happiness, to both of you," the prince wished them most cordially, and then shook hands again with both, while Mrs. Delancy, the young widow of an old husband who had made her no return for the sacrifice of her youth, smiled and blushed blissfully, like a girl again; and the hero of the occasion beamed on them all.

"We only fixed it up last night — after we left you, you old Indian," he further informed the prince, who looked properly penitent for his supposed lack of sympathy at such a crisis.

"I was really feeling played out just then," Juric murmured in self-defense.

"And you had no doubt been hitting it up on board," supplemented Oscar. "That was a wild bet

you made with Caffyn. You'd have had more reason to feel played out if you had lost it, my lad. It's high time you were reforming, and —"

"Oscar's really a model character, isn't he, Mr. Baxendale?" Nesca Carteret remarked roguishly, and once more his eyes met hers. His glance was puzzled, inquiring.

A waiter was serving soup, but Juric was not accustomed to take any notice of waiters.

"I'm going to follow Oscar's example — before very long," he informed the girl frankly. D'you know, I've just been wondering where I've met you before, Miss Carteret?"

"Nowhere," she replied. "You're probably thinking of my cousin, Noreen. I'm supposed to resemble her a little, although we're really as different as night and day. You met her in Marque, I believe, not so very long ago. And you've no doubt forgotten all about that."

"Oh, no, I haven't," he asserted glibly enough, although his heart had suddenly begun to hammer at his ribs. He felt very thankful that Oscar and his fiancée were at that moment laughing over some pleasantry with the other girls. He strove to speak unconcernedly.

"I'm not really so forgetful as you all seem to imagine. How is Miss Rosewarne? She came home some time ago. Have you seen her recently?"

"Not for an age. I've been in the Adirondacks, you see, and she's still down on Long Island."

"What part of the island?" he questioned, feel-

ing as though he would suffocate if he had to sit still much longer.

"Quite a long way from civilization," she said, regarding him with quizzical eyes, while he strove to conceal from her the hot impatience with which he waited an answer more precise; "at Bitter Creek."

The prince looked round, without changing countenance, though this cost him an extreme effort, and sprang from his chair. The others gazed after him in blank amazement as he disappeared from the room. At a desk to which he came, he demanded of the clerk there:

"When's the first train to the far end of Long Island?"

And that intelligent individual replied, no less crisply:

"Five o'clock, Thirty-fourth Street Ferry."

Afterward, Juric returned to his temporary friends at once, and, as he reseated himself with a word of apology, he seemed to have swallowed something.

"You certainly ought to see a specialist, Bolter," his host suggested severely. "Why can't you be nice and quiet and respectable for half an hour on end, eh? Take a lesson from me! You're enough to give the general public the jumps."

"But somebody snatched my cocktail-glass away, when I wasn't looking," the prince alleged plaintively, "and, if I hadn't been after it like a shot, I'd have lost my cherry. . . . And it's really the cherry in the cocktail that counts, isn't it?" said he, in an inconsequent aside.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A BREACH OF THE PEACE

OUTSIDE Sherry's the sun was shining, and, through an open window, Juric could hear the heartsome stir and clatter of the street. It seemed to him that New York was the most enchanting city he knew, and Sherry's had become to him as the portals of paradise.

But he had regained command of himself. Until five o'clock at the Thirty-Fourth Street Ferry, he could make no practical use of the information he had by such a happy chance obtained; and, if only in common gratitude for that information, he could do no less than devote himself for another hour to the entertainment of Bolter Baxendale's friend and that gentleman's guests.

Bolter Baxendale's character as good company did not suffer at his hands. He had many amusing stories to tell of his double's doings abroad, and, when some awkward question was suddenly shot at him, had always ready some apt reply. He found his part much easier to play on the safe footing of a *farceur,* privileged to turn the conversation with any convenient pleasantry whenever it might show signs of becoming too personal. Thus, he steered safely

through the shoals and quicksands of reference to familiar friends quite unknown to him.

Only once did Juric's flow of spirits suffer a momentary eclipse, and that was when the name of one Geoffrey Paige was mentioned.

"He'll have to get to work for his living before very long," said the young man at the head of the table. "You'd better take warning, from his case, Bolter. He's just about down and out. He may be lucky in love, but he certainly isn't at cards!"

"I wonder if he's succeeded yet in fascinating your cousin, Nesca," Mrs. Delancy remarked, and, for a second or two, the prince's heart almost stood still.

But Nesca Carteret shook her head.

"It's an entirely one-sided infatuation, I think," she returned. And Juric's spirits rose again, higher than ever. The others were all, indeed, most unwilling to let him go, when at last he made his excuses on the score of an appointment he could not postpone, and assured them, in answer to their expressions of disbelief in the urgency of any business of his, that he had changed very much for the better in all such respects since he left home.

"I'm going out of town for a few days," he replied to a question, "but I expect I'll be back by Thursday, next week, at latest. Of course, I'll call — that's a pleasure I've been looking forward to all the way across. And when's the wedding to take place, Oscar? You bet, I'll be there! Good-by,

Lillian. The best luck to you both. Good-by, Ethel. Good-by, Miss Carteret."

As he crossed Fifth Avenue, determined to take no more chances on that thoroughfare, he felt he had come most creditably through an ordeal, which, at the outset, had threatened to overwhelm him; and this feeling helped to inspire him with confidence in his ability to play out the rôle he had undertaken. He nodded affably to a passing policeman, who had saluted him, and met the casual glances of passers-by with assured indifference.

At a dingy little store on Sixth Avenue, Juric stopped to make one or two trifling purchases, and, having obtained a map of Long Island, went on toward the Waldorf, where he arrived without having been intercepted again. The rooms his messenger had reserved were ready for him. He got a L. I. R. R. folder from a clerk in the office, told the elevator-boy to bring in any visitors, and sat down with a cigar to study his map and the schedule of trains to and from Bitter Creek.

He did not intend that his meeting with Captain Castrique should interfere with his other and infinitely more important project. He would no doubt have been glad to postpone the former, had that been in any way feasible. But, as it was, the best he could hope for was to get it over and done with at the minimum of injury and inconvenience to himself. He would fire in the air himself, and did not anticipate that Captain Castrique would

wish to carry the matter *à outrance.* Before Count Van Hoytema was announced, he had got all his plans cut and dried, in so far as the duel was concerned, and was once more wondering how he would fare otherwise at the far end of Long Island.

The count, very exquisitely got up and tight-laced to the last limit, was at first inclined to cavil over discussing the necessary arrangements with his principal's opponent. The count was not a gentleman of any great breadth of view, and it cost the prince some pains to convince him that rules which in Europe are rigid and not to be broken need not consequently be taken as the only standard of conduct allowable in America.

"We're more apt on this side to manage our own affairs, you see," he explained to the discontented count, "and it just comes to this in the end — that, if you and your principal aren't going to carry the thing out according to my ideas, it's liable to fall through, till the first time I meet Captain Castrique on the street. So, help yourself to a high-ball, and listen to me for a moment.

"I have, of course, the choice of weapons, and we'll make it pistols. I'll be greatly obliged if you'll provide one for me. I'm too busy to see about it. The place I've picked for the meeting is a very quiet one, just far enough from New York to give the survivors a chance of getting away before the police start after them." The count reached for the decanter, and helped himself to a drink. "Take a look at this map. Do you see Bitter Creek — yes,

that's it. I'm going down there this evening. All you've got to do is to catch the eight-thirty to-morrow morning, and, as you leave the station, turn to your right along that road, and look out for me.

"As soon as you catch sight of me, give me a hundred yards start, and follow without any fuss. The less attention we attract, the better for all of us. And there's a train back at two-fifty-five, which allows us ample time. Now, is that all quite clear to you?"

Count Van Hoytema nodded, uncertainly. He did not relish the prospect of any such unceremonious encounter, and still less the prospect of flight from the police. But, in face of the quite impossible option advanced by this vulgar American, what could he do for his principal but subscribe to the scheme proposed?

"It is all quite clear to me," he said stiffly, "and, having made formal protest against the informality, I must submit. I shall arrive with my principal at Bitter Creek by the train you indicate. I shall bring two sets of pistols with me. But I must insist, monsieur, that you have a friend with you, then."

"All right, all right," said the prince soothingly, "I'll do what I can to oblige you in that respect since you are so kind. And, now it's all settled, have a cigar, won't you? No? Nor another drink? Well, if you really must be going, good-by."

Juric laughed softly to himself as the door closed,

with some symptoms of a bang, behind Count Van Hoytema; and then fell to making all his further preparations for five o'clock.

"I must travel light, I'm afraid," he told himself reflectively, and fixed on a suit-case for the easy carriage of his most likely necessities, which, since he was in a very optimistic mood, included a thin set of evening clothes. This packed, he presently dispatched it to the Long Island Railroad Station by a messenger.

"It's to go by the five-fifteen — to Bitter Creek," he told the boy. "Don't drop it into the river on your way across, and — here. Keep the change. If they want to know who it's for, tell them Mr. Brown."

"Awright, sir," agreed his uniformed Mercury, pocketing with a gleeful grin the note tossed to him. "Mr. Brown, Bitter Creek — by the five-fifteen: an' then forgit all about it. Hope you won't forgit my name, sir, next time you need a messenger."

As he disappeared, Juric counted over the cash remaining in Bolter Baxendale's note-case, a precaution that had not previously suggested itself to him.

"A few dollars over a thousand," said he to himself contentedly. "More than enough — as things are. But it might have been very awkward if I had been staying in town."

When he had completed his preparations, the prince tied to the trunks he was leaving behind some of the printed tags bearing Baxendale's name, of

which there was a plentiful supply to his hand; and, having rung for the maid, confided them to her care, till he should either return in person, or send for them. A last glance at the mirror assured him that he was no less unimpeachably Baxendale than he had been, and with that he betook himself to the ground floor again. It was not more than four o'clock, and, even allowing himself half an hour to walk to the ferry — he did not mean to run any risk of losing his train — he had still half an hour to dispose of.

Someone nodded to him in the vestibule, and this scared him not a little. He was only anxious now to escape from New York undiscovered, without any further test of his talent for impersonation. He sought refuge from his fellows in an inconspicuous corner of the huge smoking-room he had by chance sauntered into, gave an importunate waiter an order, and, having paid his check, further sheltered himself behind the outspread sheets of an *Evening Telegram*. He had not, apparently, noticed a quiet-looking man in a dark serge suit who, having followed him into the room, sat down at an empty table not far away, and seemed to be waiting till he should lower the paper again to catch another glimpse of his features.

His mind was, in fact, very far removed from the Waldorf. He was wondering, for the fiftieth time, how he would fare at his journey's end, and what luck he would have on the morrow. So far, fortune had favored him, and beyond his most sanguine dreams. If only his luck would hold,

what happiness might not he achieve during his brief days of freedom — and for the future! Engrossed in that golden dream, he sat staring with far-away eyes at the paper before him, till he recollected again that he had a train to catch.

When he looked at his watch, the time was twenty minutes past four. The straw in his cobbler tempted him to absorb some of that most refreshing concoction. Then, he selected with great care a cigar from Baxendale's case, and strolled toward the door, restraining with an effort the restless impulse that bade him hurry off at his best speed. He passed into the porte-cochère, and paused by one of the pillars there, to light his cigar. As he bent his head above the match, someone touched him on the shoulder, and he looked round with a start, to discover at his elbow a quiet-looking man in a dark serge suit, unobtrusively displaying a metal badge on the turned-up lapel of his coat.

"I thought it would be pleasanter for you, Mr. Baxendale," said that individual, very matter of fact, "if I mentioned the matter to you out here, instead of inside among all those folk."

"You're very good," Juric agreed courteously, but not quite clear as to what this mysterious, soft-footed stranger might mean. "What matter were you going to mention? I'm rather in a hurry, you see. I haven't more than a moment to spare."

The man displayed his badge again.

"I'm sorry to inconvenience you," he remarked, "But — you understand!"

"I don't, really," the prince a little irritably assured the man, who raised his eyebrows with a tolerant smile that still further annoyed his highness.

"You are Mr. Baxendale, aren't you?" asked the stranger.

"You can see that for yourself, can't you?" answered the prince.

"Then, I must arrest you. That's plain enough, isn't it?" said the plain-clothes policeman, huffed by an obtuseness which he could only suppose to be assumed.

"Arrest me!" echoed Juric, regarding the officer dazedly. "Arrest me! What under high heaven for?"

"Breach o' the peace — contemplated: information sworn by Lester Burdick, of the *American Eagle* for some friend of his. And you know as well as I do, Mr. Baxendale, that dueling's against the law. So, now, will you come quietly, or shall I call the patrolman?"

CHAPTER NINE

BULLET AND BILLET

"WILL you come quietly?" the officer asked again. "You might just as well, you know. It will save you trouble."

"As like a lamb as possible," replied the prince, who had already recovered a little from the first shock of that most disastrous encounter, and was already applying his wits to the apparently hopeless task of still saving the situation. "Where d'you want me to go?"

"The station-house is only three or four blocks away. We can walk along together without any fuss, or I'll call a cab if you like."

Juric struck another match, and, when he had got his cigar alight, said amiably:

"I'd just as soon walk."

They turned west along Thirty-fourth Street, and the prince thought despairingly of the ferry, in the opposite direction, on the way to Bitter Creek. Within three short, crowded blocks he could have practically no chance to break away with any prospect of making good his escape. He swore hotly under his breath at the evil hap that had brought

him into this predicament, and then had to admit to himself that it was his own fault entirely. He did not doubt that it had been Baxendale, in conjunction with the newspaper-man he himself had met on Fifth Avenue and fobbed off upon his friend with a card of introduction, who had taken this drastic step to save him from the consequences of his own folly. He could not blame anyone but himself for it all, and that did not make his plight any the less excruciating to him.

His captor conducted him across Broadway at Herald Square into Sixth Avenue, and in the throng of the traffic there he had almost made up his mind to attempt a wild dash for liberty. But a hasty second thought served to convince him that any such experiment must prove futile — unless he should first push his companion under a passing car.

That side of Sixth Avenue was torn up, and a temporary wooden rail penned the foot-passengers still more closely together, while it saved them from being crushed into the deep open trench at one side. The prince squeezed along through the crowd, outwardly at his ease, but inwardly in a ferment, his temporary attendant close at his elbow. An elephantine Irish laborer came pushing through the press with a hod of mortar, oblivious to the black looks and objurgations of those he jostled or trod upon in his contemptuous progress.

The prince's companion tripped over something — which, he did not perceive, was one of his prisoner's feet thrust opportunely between his ankles — and

butted into the hod-carrier like a goat, at about where the fourth button of the Irishman's waistcoat would have been had he been wearing a waistcoat. The hod fell among the multitude from on high, and, with a howl of mingled amazement, rage and pain, the Irishman fell upon the unfortunate plain-clothes officer. Pandemonium seemed to have suddenly broken forth on the inclosed side-walk, as other anxious volunteers who had suffered from the contents of the hod helped him to hold down and belabor the prostrate author of the accident.

The prince did not pause to explain the delusion under which they were acting, but, worming his way out of the immediate crush, bolted, as if for his life, up the adjacent stairway to the Elevated, boarded a departing train in the teeth of an irate conductor, and, two minutes later, descended again, into Forty-second Street.

A cross-town car and a transfer took him to the ferry without undue loss of time, but he was too late. The five o'clock boat had just started across the river, and, when the next landed him in Long Island City, his train had gone.

He turned away, without any change of expression, from the closed gates of the empty platform. He knew there was no other train till half-past eight the next morning, and to travel by that would most probably involve detection and recapture. He could not afford to allow the enemy time to get on his track.

A brief tour of investigation and inquiry in the vicinity of the station resulted in his hiring a somewhat rickety motor-car and the services of a mechanic, who undertook to carry him safely as far as Farmingdale — but no farther — by dark. That was only some thirty miles of the ninety or so to be covered before he could reach Bitter Creek, but even a third of a loaf is better than no bread at all, he reflected. He took his seat contentedly, and, after several false starts, endured without a murmur the manifold discomforts of that memorable journey. A final breakdown not far from Bethpage Junction, long after nightfall, left him once more to his own resources. He smoothed the mechanic's ruffled feelings with a sufficient *douceur*, and set forward for the village on foot, with a couple of miles still to cover.

A freight-train trundled past as he came to the junction, and he stopped to watch its tail-lamps disappear in the distance. It was following the wrong line for him, and, noticing this instinctively, an inspiration occurred to him. He had to wait for a long time before another appeared, and had nothing save a thin overcoat to protect him against the autumnal cold, but he was not to be daunted in his determination to reach Bitter Creek before morning.

He took to the side of the track as the next down-train at length came crawling toward him out of the night, its far-off headlight no more than a

spark in the gloom. The spark grew slowly into a glare, which took the direction he wanted to follow.

The train had slowed at the switch, and he saw that it consisted chiefly of empty cars. Ere it gathered speed again, he had made a wild leap in the darkness, was clinging with might and main to the side of an open truck, into which he presently clambered, breathless, but exultant beyond expression: for it had been neck or nothing with him, and, now, he had solved his most immediate and pressing difficulty, so far at least as the train might take him.

Casting about him for any available comfort, the prince discovered a ragged tarpaulin in one corner, and, sitting down, was about to pull this over him for further protection from the keen night-air, when a hoarse voice from underneath it profanely requested him to desist. He learned, in the course of a curt preliminary conversation, that he was not the only person engaged in breaking the railroad regulations that night, and had soon struck up a friendly acquaintance with the invisible person who presently offered to share the tarpaulin with him.

There was no false pride about his highness of Jetland. He accepted the offer thankfully, and in return bestowed on his traveling-companion one of his few remaining cigars. The tramp turned out to be by no means bad company. He had once been, Juric soon discovered, a man of some means and more education. His present pseudonym was

Nebo, the Nailer, more commonly called the Nailer for short. . . . The prince referred to himself as Mr. Brown.

They smoked and chatted contentedly for a time till Juric, learning from the other that the train was going through to the terminus, and not a little fatigued after the excitements of the preceding twenty-four hours, lay down to snatch an hour's sleep. His fellow-vagrant readily undertook to call him before they should reach Bitter Creek, or be discovered in their unlawful location.

An empty and almost springless freight-car is no couch of down, but he slept soundly at intervals throughout that seemingly interminable journey. And he sat up without a word of complaint, when a dig in the ribs from his casual acquaintance apprised him that he was nearing his destination. It was still dark.

"Next station for yours," the Nailer informed him, gruffly. "There's a bank just this side of it in a fir-wood, where you'd best jump off. We'll be running through in five minutes.

"Now's your time," he remarked presently, and the prince, with a hurried word or two of thanks and farewell, leaped safely onto the soft grass of the low embankment there.

The gray promise of dawn soon afforded him light sufficient to find his way as far as the highroad, and he followed this till he came to the station, a typical unimproved Long Island arrangement of weather-boarding, tarred felt and galvanized iron. On the

other side of the road stood a solitary disconsolate-looking store. There was no sign of life anywhere, till he heard a dog growling at the sound of his footsteps. He would have been glad of a cup of coffee and something to eat, but did not care to encounter the curiosity of the store-keeper and the station-agent. So, he quenched his thirst at a brackish stream, and forgot his hunger for the time-being.

It was evident to him as he strolled along, in no hurry since he had the whole forenoon ahead of him, that he could not have chosen a more convenient locality for the meeting in prospect. He did not doubt for a moment that Captain Castrique and the count would keep their appointment with him. The country about Bitter Creek was undulating, composed of sand-hills and hollows, wooded in part, and absolutely uncultivated: he might have thought it uninhabited also, had he not known that there was a village of sorts and a summer colony a mile or two away, on the south shore, which he meant to investigate as soon as he should be free to do so.

He turned northward off the road through a wild hedgerow of scrub, and tramped for a time in that direction, over country that grew ever rougher and more wild and broken. The scent of the sea met his nostrils, and, as the sun rose, a pleasant languor stole over him. He could very comfortably have lain down and slept in the safe shelter of some thicket, but he would not give way to weakness, lest time should take advantage of him while he was unconscious of its silent flight.

From the brow of a bluff, he saw the sea in the distance, and changed his course, bearing east toward a wide open space among low hills and hummocks that seemed to shut it off from the living world. This turned out to be an extensive lake, a most picturesque sheet of water within its irregular shores of squat, abrupt, tree-clad cliffs and stretches of golden sand. It lay very still and silent in these solitudes. Seemingly, the prince might have been the first explorer who had ever set eyes on it.

In a rock-bound cove he soon reached, he made a leisurely toilette, which included a most luxurious dive into the cold, clear depths of the lake and then a lazy swim. The sun soon dried him, and to appease his consequent appetite he smoked a cigar while he dressed again. When he had got through with that, he fell to whistling cheerfully. He felt extremely well, and was indeed entirely content with his lot in life.

Retracing his steps in the direction of the high-road, he came almost immediately on an ideal spot for the nefarious proceedings in contemplation, a longitudinal depression in the earth's surface, flat as a billiard-table below its sloping embankment of sand, further sheltered by a thick screen of brush at the brim of the natural inclosure, beyond which stood a thick belt of woodland, all but impassable with undergrowth.

The prince studied the sun.

"At half-past twelve," he said to himself, "it will be just right. What a choice little nook!" And

he set off, to find the straightest possible path to and from the highroad.

That afforded him occupation sufficient to keep him from wearying until the noon train was almost due, and nowhere throughout his wanderings did he come across other human being or sign of habitation. Even on the open highroad, there was no one visible when he ensconced himself in the scrub at its edge again, there to await his confederates as he had arranged.

There was no great gathering about the station to meet the train. A couple of ramshackle rigs stood at the hitching-rail beside the road. Four or five indolent figures were lounging about the platform in the neighborhood of the agent's office. The bars at the level crossing came slowly down, and five minutes afterward the train steamed slowly in.

Of the four passengers who alighted from it at Bitter Creek, two presently turned out to be Count Van Hoytema and Captain Castrique. They crossed the line, and followed the road to their right, without apparently having attracted any undue attention. The prince was pleased to observe as they approached that they were not dressed more conspicuously than was necessary. Count Van Hoytema was carrying a small hand-bag.

He looked round in response to Juric's low whistle, and had turned off into the scrub with his companion before the train left the station. The prince led the way, only a few yards ahead of them, in case they should get out of touch, and so carefully

had he reconnoitered the path that, ten minutes later, they reached the place he had chosen for the encounter. Captain Castrique looked about him appreciatively as he shuffled down the sand-bank to the beautiful level below.

But Count Van Hoytema's finical features expressed anything but pleasure as, having set down his bag and pulled off his great-coat, he approached the prince, raising his hat.

"Monsieur is quite alone here?" he asked in evident discontent. And, as the prince bowed affirmatively: "But, *mon dieu,*" he cried, "it is impossible to proceed on such footing. In an affair of honor, Monsieur Baxendale, it is of paramount necessity that each principal shall be accompanied by a friend."

"I hadn't time to find a friend to act for me," the prince returned with grave politeness. He did not intend that the meeting should be postponed on that account. "I was arrested last night in New York on the charge of contemplated dueling, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that I succeeded in keeping our appointment at all. I thought that, under such circumstances, your principal wouldn't object to your acting for both of us."

"It is really most irregular," muttered the count. "Who, for instance, will see to your burial — and so on, monsieur? It may give rise to awkward complications innumerable. I must, in fairness, inform you that Captain Castrique is a first-class shot."

"Don't let that distress you," the prince adjured

him. "If I'm dead, it won't worry me, and of course, you will both be perfectly free to look after yourselves as soon as the shooting is over. I don't expect you to undertake the part of an undertaker." Count Van Hoytema regarded the speaker very doubtfully, but Juric's expression was perfectly serious. "Put the matter before your principal," he suggested; and the count proceeded to do so.

Captain Castrique, as the prince had expected, made no great demur to the somewhat unusual arrangement proposed. It was his deliberate intention to take the life of the presumptuous plebeian, who had put such a grievous slight on his dignity as to tread upon his toes. He was loftily indifferent to all those preliminaries on which the punctilious count set such store. And the count, in the minority, had at last to agree to act for both sides.

He glanced at the sun, drew a line in the sand, and, having taken twenty paces exactly, drew another line at that end. From his bag, he produced two pistols and a packet of cartridges. After a very careful examination of each, he loaded both weapons, and Captain Castrique, having won the toss for first choice, picked up unconcernedly that nearest his hand, flicked a cigarette-end from between his fingers, and fell to humming an unmelodious tune. Captain Castrique was apparently quite accustomed to such scenes. He scowled, however, as the prince began to whistle plaintively.

The prince won the toss for place, and, pistol in hand, took up his position, where he applied him-

self to staring Captain Castrique out of countenance: a design in which he was partially successful at any rate. For even on nerves of steel his indomitable assurance could not but have some prejudicial effect. Captain Castrique had intended, as a mark of the contempt he felt for his adversary, to fight in the big motor-coat he was wearing, which would of course, have made him a much easier mark. But, at the last moment, he slipped this off, and, in his place at the opposite line, stared back at the prince, chin over one shoulder, exposing himself no more than was necessary.

The count, ostentatiously displaying the white handkerchief, which he was to drop as an additional signal to fire, came into position well at one side, equidistant from the combatants.

"You will both fire immediately I drop my handkerchief, at the word three," he instructed them, and forthwith counted in a flat, monotonous voice at even intervals, "One — two — *three!*" At the same instant, the handkerchief fell. Two shots rang out almost simultaneously. One bullet whizzed past Captain Castrique's head, so alarmingly close that he started aside with a suppressed exclamation. The other had found its billet. Even as he fired, the prince had collapsed in a crumpled heap. The breast of his gray tweed jacket, closely buttoned, was all adrip as he clutched at it. Beneath his back, the sand was soaking. He kicked convulsively once or twice, and then lay still.

Captain Castrique, his face suddenly very white,

his thin nostrils pinched, looked furtively across at the count. Together, they approached the prone body. The prince had ceased to breathe. They looked at each other again.

"We'd better be off," Count Van Hoytema said in a difficult, husky whisper. "He's done for. We'd better be off."

He picked up the still smoking pistol which the prince's lifeless fingers had dropped, and, pocketing it, made toward his coat and bag.

"Wait a minute," ordered Captain Castrique. "Help me to carry him out of sight first — up there, among the bushes."

They lifted him, very gingerly lest they should incur any tell-tale stain, and lugged him, head hanging limp, hands trailing in the hot sand, up the slope, then thrust him feet first, face downward, into the tangle of growth at the top.

Captain Castrique tossed his pistol down at one side.

"If he's ever found, they'll think he has shot himself," said he cunningly, and went shuffling down the slope again, to smooth out the trampled sand, and to cover over the dark, wet patch where the prince had fallen.

"Come on, now," he said at length, satisfied with the results of his efforts in this direction, and, picking up his coat, made off. "I think that makes a sufficiently safe end of your Monsieur Baxendale," said he to himself, with a would-be sardonic sneer to mask his uneasiness.

Count Van Hoytema was not slow to follow, and they finally disappeared over the rim of the hollow, without so much as a single backward glance, in haste to make their escape. Meanwhile, the still figure they had left behind lay staring up at the sun through the growth above it, with unseeing eyes.

CHAPTER TEN

THE MOTH AND THE CANDLE

"YES," said Lester Burdick, crisply; "he's got it all fixed up to fill your friend Baxendale full of lead, bright and early tomorrow morning."

Bolter Baxendale looked at the clock again. It was after one. He was inwardly furious: first with Castrique for his ignorant arrogance, then with Juric for having turned to such ill-account at the very outset the part he was playing, and last, but by no means least, with himself for having undertaken that rôle which had rendered possible a contre-têmps fraught with contingencies so alarming.

"I might have known how that scatterbrain would behave!" he told himself, fuming, and resolved on the instant that the Prince of Jetland must at once, by hook or by crook, be brought back to the hotel, must forthwith change places with him again. "And it will give me the greatest pleasure in life to have a shot at that infernal fellow, Castrique, myself," he reflected irritably as he once more pressed the bell-push.

"My compliments to Captain Castrique, and I want to see him at once," he directed Ernst, as that

worthy appeared in haste. "How can we get hold of Mr. Baxendale, Mr. Burdick?" he asked, while he waited the coming of the chief culprit.

"Well," said the newspaper-man with a sapient shake of the head, "he's a hard case to handle, your highness, and nothing short of sheer force will prevent him keeping any appointment of that sort."

"We must use force, then," declared Baxendale, "and—" He paused as the Baron Carquois entered, looking mildly surprised.

"Your highness has perhaps forgotten," the baron remarked, "that Captain Castrique and the Count Van Hoytema have your highness's leave of absence for—'

"Have they gone?" Baxendale interrupted.

"But five minutes ago," the Baron Carquois informed him, respectfully.

"Are they coming back?"

"Undoubtedly, your highness, since they are to dine with us here to-night. It is not until to-morrow morning that—"

"Thank you," said Baxendale briefly, and the baron, bowing, retired again.

"I'll lay both of them by the heels, the moment they show up here," said the supposed prince in choleric accents, "but, meantime, Mr. Burdick, it would be well, if only for his sake, to have Mr. Baxendale, also, brought before me. I think I can exact from him a promise that the matter shall go no further while I am here. My position at the moment, as you will no doubt understand, is too

delicate to have any of my *entourage* involved in an affair of honor with a citizen of this country. The complications that might ensue would perhaps become international. I am sure, since Mr. Baxendale himself has introduced you to me, that I can confide in your good sense and good feeling to help me out of this distressing dilemma. I have heard that you gentlemen of the press in America have wide powers. I place myself unreservedly in your hands, Mr. Burdick, and beg that you will undertake to bring Mr. Baxendale before me again without delay."

He saw that his carefully worded appeal had not failed of good effect. Burdick was quite apparently pleased with this tribute to the power of the press, and tapped his teeth contemplatively with a pencil for a few seconds.

"I suppose I could get him arrested if I swore the information," said he, "and that's about the only way we could hold Bolter Baxendale up. But why don't you put those two rufflers of yours behind the bars for a bit, your highness?"

"Because that would bring me all the publicity I've been at such pains to escape. I couldn't trust them to hold their tongues, if I put upon them such an indignity. You don't know my countrymen, Mr. Burdick, but their assumption and self-esteem are sometimes quite medieval. I am anxious beyond expression to keep for a few days longer — till Thursday next week, at least — the secret of my identity, which you have so cleverly penetrated. And I know

I can trust you to do me that trifling favor," he added assuredly, as he observed how doubtful the other looked. "It is also for Mr. Baxendale's own benefit that such a step should be taken, and it need only be for a few hours that he is detained. It will, of course, be possible for me to — what is the expression to use — bail him out, eh? So, if you can arrange it all for me, I shall be unspeakably grateful to you."

Mr. Burdick was tapping his teeth again, and looking none too well pleased. He had intended that the prince should provide him with material for a story, and did not like to let the opportunity escape. But he held high ideals as to the duties of a man in his responsible profession, and would not have intruded willingly on the poor privacy of any prince in the wide world. The story in this case could be of but minor interest, and the duel, put a stop to, would not be worth writing up. He shook his head regretfully, however, even as he agreed to let his report of the prince's presence in New York stand over till the following Thursday at any rate.

"I've a date at Atlanta to-morrow with a trust magnate," he mentioned, partly, perhaps, to appease his journalistic, as opposed to his personal, conscience, "which, I expect, will keep the public busy buying our paper for the next few days. After that sensation's over, I'll introduce you to 'em, prince. But you'll let me be the first to do so?"

"Anything I can do in return for your kindness, I will," Baxendale declared, relieved in part of the

apprehensions that had beset him. "And as to laying hands on our mutual friend?"

"I'll see to that. You be ready when I ring you up to come down to the station, and bail him out. He won't be any too well pleased, you can bet your sweet life, when you find him there, but, as you say, it's all for his good. So, I'll set the sleuths on his track at once, and trust you to see that he doesn't blame me for it all."

"You're sure you can manage it?" Baxendale asked.

"Sure!" returned Burdick, with a self-confidence that went far to remove the other's remaining misgivings. "Glad to have made your acquaintance, prince. Any friend of Mr. Baxendale's can always count on me at a pinch. Good-morn — Great Roosevelt! What was that?"

Baxendale glanced disgustedly across at Professor Jocrisse, who had just cleared his throat with volcanic violence, and was now working his eyebrows up and down at a great rate of speed, with a most uncanny effect.

"My medical man," he mentioned reassuringly to Burdick.

"He ought to take a couple of pounds of cough-drops for that throat of his," the newspaper-man opined, in an awed whisper. "Good-morning, your highness."

"You'll let me hear from you as soon as you possibly can," begged Baxendale at the door, and the

nod with which his friend in need departed quite satisfied him.

"Now, what the devil am I to do with this explosive Goliath, till Juric turns up?" Baxendale asked himself, having seen Burdick safely past the remaining members of the suite in the parlor adjoining, and having eyed Professor Jocrisse with unfeigned dislike. "I wonder the hotel people don't complain about the uproar he makes. I'll be very thankful, anyhow, when I'm through with this farce — and, in the first place, I must get into some less-conspicuous clothes."

He summoned Ernst, who led the way toward the prince's dressing-room. As Baxendale passed through the next room, closely followed by the professor, the suite rose to their feet in accordance with custom.

"You will send Count Van Hoytema and Captain Castrique to me as soon as they come in," ordered Baxendale, addressing himself to the Baron Carquois, and the baron bowed profoundly.

"Immediately they come in, your highness," he promised.

The prince's personal apartments were just across a private corridor, opposite the parlor occupied by the suite, through which were to be entered the inner anteroom where Baxendale had breakfasted and the audience-chamber beyond. As Ernst opened the door of the dressing-room, Baxendale discovered his other attendant.

"What in blazes do you want?" he demanded, incensed beyond measure by the professor's pursuit of him, and repeated the question no less hotly in that unmoved individual's native tongue.

"His majesty most particularly commanded me," the professor explained again, with his eyebrows amid the hair of his head, "not to lose sight of your highness for a single instant."

Baxendale looked malignantly for a moment at the man's huge bulk, and, with a grimace of impotent annoyance, preceded him into the dressing-room.

"Let him lock this door, and sit down in your bedroom, highness," suggested Ernst; and the professor was pleased to approve that arrangement when Baxendale put it to him. It was not at all his policy to be disobliging or troublesome, but he was determined that the emperor should have no fault to find with him as to the discharge of his responsible duties. He locked the outer door of the dressing-room, and took up his post in the bedroom within.

From the extensive wardrobe displayed by Ernst, Baxendale chose for the afternoon the least conspicuous in cut and color of the numerous lounge suits it included. While Ernst was helping him out of his close-fitting uniform and into mufti, he found time for further reflection.

The only possible flaw he could see, in the plan to be put into execution by Burdick, was that the prince might already have left New York. Failing that, he did not doubt that Juric of Jetland would presently be safe in the hands of the police. And, then,

it would not be long before he was himself again.

He caught sight of a thick roll of crisp new bills on the dressing-table.

"Did his highness take much money with him, Ernst?" he asked, and Ernst, on his knees, looked up as if in surprise.

"Mr. Baxendale, highness?" he asked. "So far as I know, only what he had in a note-case in his breast-pocket."

"You mean my note-case?"

"Mr. Baxendale's note-case, highness."

"He'd only find about a thousand in that," thought Baxendale, disdaining to argue the point, and had another question to ask. It had just occurred to him that he might have to find heavy bail for his foolish friend.

"How much cash have you in the treasury?" he demanded, knowing that among Ernst's various offices in the prince's privy service was that of purse-bearer and clerk of accounts.

"Over two hundred thousand American dollars, highness," the man answered, without the least hesitation.

"I suppose you've no idea where his high — Mr. Baxendale's off to?"

"Not the slightest, highness," said Ernst indifferently; and he rose, having buttoned Baxendale's boots.

"If I had only remembered to tell him that he'd have to lunch with Oscar Quayle in my place, I'd have known where to lay hands on him at this mo-

ment," thought Bolter Baxendale vexedly, "but, 'pon my word, I had absolutely forgotten — last night seems so long ago."

He grew restless and ill at ease again, long before Ernst had finished with him, and, when he was at length turned out to that careful conspirator's entire satisfaction, felt that he could no longer contain himself. He must take some more active steps in the search which the police were no doubt by now conducting. If he could only, by good luck, chance upon the prince in the street, it might still be possible to save him from the indignity of being locked up.

He stared witlessly for a moment at the exact replica of his highness of Jetland which was once more staring back at him out of a mirror — but more like a moth in his mufti than the gay butterfly he had been in full uniform — and then, having tried the locked door that led to the corridor, recalled the oppressive existence of Professor Jocrisse. Professor Jocrisse was instant in answer to his irascible summons, and the two returned to the parlor opposite.

"Hasn't Captain Castrique come in yet?" Baxendale asked the Baron Carquois, and had almost looked his annoyance as the baron replied in the negative. But he recollected in time that it would not do to display his feelings so openly.

"I'm going out for an hour or two," he informed the baron and Major-General Mandarin, who were keeping each other company there while Admiral Agassiz was changing his clothes. "When Captain Castrique and Count Van Hoytema return, they are

to be at once advised that their leave of absence is canceled — and that they are both to consider themselves under close arrest. Neither of them is to leave the hotel again, on any pretext whatever, without my further permission. Each of you will be personally responsible to me that these orders are carried out."

He had spoken in his most princely tone, and could see that he had impressed them as he had intended. Even Professor Jocrisse, who had seized this opportunity to envelop himself in a capacious fur coat, seemed to regard him with added respect as he crossed the corridor again and, looking in on Ernst, ordered:

"If any telephone message should come for me, write it down."

"Yes, highness," Ernst promised respectfully, and, clapping his hat on, Baxendale strode down the corridor, attended only by Professor Jocrisse. The Baron Carquois had not deemed it politic to press upon him the company of another of his retainers; that diplomatist no doubt thought that the professor could be trusted to cope with the situation single-handed. And it seemed that his confidence was not misplaced. The professor, a few paces behind Baxendale, followed that young man's every movement with eagle eye as they made their way in this order of march down Fifth Avenue.

Baxendale passed practically unnoticed among the multitude afoot there on that sunny afternoon, and, when he had overcome a spasmodic impulse to

bow to or hail in friendly fashion acquaintances of his own whom he met by the way, was fain to congratulate himself on the fact that Juric of Jetland was quite unknown in New York. The fresh air was proving an effectual tonic for his recent vexation of spirit. He felt sure now that, within a very few hours, he would be free again to follow his own devices, and, when, in the course of time, he reached Madison Square, he was almost inclined to laugh at the fears he had been harboring in the back of his mind.

As he turned there, Professor Jocrisse interrupted.

"Luncheon," said that sapient personage, in the tone of authority which had at first so annoyed Baxendale. "Your highness will eat."

Baxendale looked about him reflectively. He had forgotten the time. The idea was not distasteful to him.

"We'll drop into Martin's," he agreed, and led the way to that resort of the hungry.

"Just the place Juric might drop into, too," he told himself as they entered.

The professor politely declined his kind offer of a cocktail, but made a magnificent meal without the aid of that appetizer. Baxendale had finished some time before, but sat contentedly smoking while the guardian giant consumed a final porterhouse steak, and topped that off with a portion of cheese that added eighty cents to their check. In his vast fur-lined coat, with a foot-long cigar between his lips, he made a more than sufficiently imposing figure, and

Baxendale was glad when the man fell behind again, as they sauntered up the other side of Fifth Avenue.

At the Waldorf, Baxendale stopped in passing, and they had coffee there. But nowhere, about the public apartments of the big hotel or by the way, could he catch sight of anyone in the least like the man he was looking for. It was perhaps because he was paying so little attention to the innumerable women who passed that he did not notice particularly at once one who was being carried swiftly up the hill in a capacious touring-car, as he turned into Fifth Avenue again on his way from the hotel. He could see no more than the back of her head and shoulders, when he recovered his wits sufficiently to realize of whom it was that she reminded him so strongly.

"But it's absolutely absurd and impossible!" he told himself, looking round in a desperate hurry for some vehicle in which to give chase, till he saw that the touring-car had stopped in front of a building a hundred yards ahead of him. And the figure that stepped from it was still more amazingly like—! "But how could it be?" he argued mentally, as he started off at top speed, intent only on overtaking that form. . . . Professor Jocrisse panted after him in sudden alarm and suspicion.

The crowd on the sidewalk hampered progress sadly, however, and the professor was able to keep close at his heels. Almost together, they entered an enormous department-store, and, pushing past the swing-doors, quartered every foot of the ground-floor without result, except that the professor became still

more hot and breathless in his heavy coat. He could not conceive what object his charge had in view among all those women — until there flashed across his mind with horrific clearness the words of the emperor concerning the Painted Lady.

Disdaining the aid of the busy elevator, Baxendale dashed upstairs to the second story, but with no better result. The third and the fourth, explored throughout in turn, yielded him not the slightest ground for belief that his own eyes had not deceived him. And, of course, he knew it was perfectly preposterous to suppose that her highness, the Princess Ingrid of Marque and the Lesser Isles, could by any possibility whatsoever be shopping on Fifth Avenue that afternoon.

None the less, he did not intend to desist from his search, till he had found out who it was that so closely resembled her. Then, on the next floor, he caught sight again, from afar, of the girl who had alighted from the touring-car at the door below. She had apparently been making some purchase at the counter from which she was moving away. Her back was toward him. She turned into a cross-section, and disappeared from his view.

He did not feel at all comfortable about following her further, and the professor, puffing along behind him, was already in a state of scandalized astonishment at his audacity in having penetrated so far among the intimate mysteries of feminine attire visible about them. They had passed, stage by stage, from the perfectly decorous tailored costumes on the

ground-floor, through the department devoted to evening gowns and wraps, by way of the underskirts and silk petticoats to the hosiery saloons, and were now threading their way through the throng of women about the counters dedicated to the display of corsets.

At the threshold of the cross-section down which had disappeared the damsel, in whose pursuit Baxendale had proved himself so greatly daring, that rash adventurer halted and drew back, at last dismayed. He did not, as has been shown, lack nerve, but — into the *arcanum* devoted, according to the gold-lettered sign on the open arch at its entrance, to " white goods," as if the whitest of white goods profusely apparent within were not sign and warning sufficient, he could not intrude. He had not yet accomplished his purpose either, for she was again bending over the counter in consultation with the clerk there, her shoulder toward him. But he drew back, scarcely less disconcerted than the now hotly perspiring professor, and waited, out of sight of her, to intercept the object of his quest as she should come forth again.

Their presence there for a few moments would no doubt have escaped other reproof than might have been conveyed by an indignant sniff from some stout matron looking up from envious inspection of a slim *Perséphone,* had not the over-charged professor just then felt impelled to clear his throat, which he did thoroughly. A battery, a whole artillery brigade of righteously indignant glances, was at once focused

upon him and his abashed companion. And, at that critical conjuncture, Baxendale suddenly caught sight again of the fair unknown, entering the elevator at the extreme end of the corridor in which he was standing. She had made her way thither from the far end of the aisle through which he had not had the courage to follow her.

Business for an instant at a standstill in consequence of the professor's performance, and traffic almost suspended, there was a partially clear path to the end of the corridor, and down that Baxendale bolted, desperate. The elevator was already descending, but he intended to hold it at any cost.

He had not, however, counted with the professor, incensed beyond all bearing by the extremely unfavorable attention now being bestowed on him, who had only trespassed there at the stern dictates of duty, against all his own inclinations and sense of propriety. The professor saw in this sudden dash only an attempt to escape him. He flew after Baxendale as fast as his bulk would allow him.

Baxendale heard the elephantine footsteps close at his heels, could almost feel a heavy hand on his shoulder. At his wits' end to elude that insensate pursuit, he pulled forward into the professor's path as he rushed past it an elaborate corset-model set on a skirt-stand covered by a white petticoat, in a supposedly safe corner. The professor cannoned into it with a grunt of rage, thrust one foot into the wire frame which formed its base, clutched it frantically round the waist to save himself from falling head-

long, and, amid the scandalized, panic-stricken or properly wrathful stares of the countless onlookers, waltzed furiously down the corridor with it for perhaps twenty paces before he at last came to earth with a crash, clasping it to his breast — not at all affectionately, but because his foot was still fast in its frame.

The shocked silence that ensued among the spectators was broken only by his stertorous breathing, till somewhere in the background someone laughed, hysterically: and of that laugh was born a pæan of mirth that penetrated as far as the costumes on the ground-floor. The spectacle of the prodigious professor in that predicament had vanquished all gravity. Among the many who had been privileged to observe his amazing progress, only Baxendale continued to harbor resentment against the victim; and even he could not but join in the general hilarity for a moment.

He had been held up before he could reach the elevator by a strong posse of floor-walkers, drawn thither from other departments by the professor's preliminary explosion, and had perforce to give up all hope of finding out who the lady of the mysterious likeness might be. Naturally, he was no less infuriated with the professor than was that gentleman with him. He helped, however, to extricate his too faithful attendant from the wiry clutch of the indecorous model, and set the man on his feet again. The huge eyebrows were going like a gorilla's.

"A friend of mine — a foreigner — insisted on

coming in here to buy himself a corset," he explained unconcernedly, in response to the chief floor-walker's request for some explanation of the incident. "He tripped over that confounded dummy. I'll pay the damage, whatever it is, and take him away at once." And, having paid without a murmur, the cost of half-a-dozen corsets, he and the professor were carefully escorted to a side-door downstairs, and bowed coldly out into the street.

The touring-car, which had been standing at the Fifth Avenue entrance, had, of course, disappeared, and Baxendale could not but feel that fortune had treated him ill. Yet, at frequent intervals on his way back to the St. Regulus, he broke into uncontrollable spasms of laughter; while the unfortunate Professor glowered at him from under deep-drawn brows.

Ernst met them at the elevator-entrance to the prince's apartment, and, having informed Baxendale in reply to his question, that Captain Castrique and the count had not yet returned, handed him a written message, taken down at the telephone five minutes before. It was from Lester Burdick, to this effect:

"Have got on to our man. Expect to pull him in at any moment now. More later."

"Ass!" said Baxendale, angrily. "Why isn't he more explicit?" And, then, he recollected that Burdick, taking him for the prince, could not reasonably have been expected to enter into more detail. "But I'll be myself again very shortly now," he reflected; and, as he sat down with a cigar before the

fire in the anteroom, he fell to thinking again of the girl he thought he had seen on Fifth Avenue.

"Of course, it was simply an hallucination on my part," he once more assured himself, "but, if it had really been the princess —"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE POWER OF THE PRESS

"HER Highness, the Princess Ingrid of Marque and the Lesser Isles, passed through New York yesterday."

Baxendale, sitting up in bed with a morning paper outspread before him, had to read that curt announcement twice to himself and a third time aloud, before he could really grasp its heart-rending import. And, then, he lay limply back on the pillows behind him, a prey to the most overwhelming melancholy. He felt that fortune had finally turned her back on him.

He had slept badly, after waiting up till the small hours in the expectation, eventually vain, of hearing that the prince had been retrieved by the police. He had even called up the office of *The American Eagle* and asked for Burdick, only to be told that that ineffectual friend had left New York for Atlanta. And he could do no more than that in the matter, since to have communicated directly with police-headquarters would have involved inquiries the result of which might have been most unhappy for all concerned.

Captain Castrique and Count Van Hoytema had

not returned to their quarters, but were still at large — a fact that may best be accounted for by the corresponding fact that a timeous word of warning as to the fate in store for them there had reached them through the instrumentality of Rear-Admiral Agassiz. The Baron Carquois and Major-General Mandarin, made personally responsible for the arrest and detention of the absentees, had very naturally taken the admiral into their confidence, and the bottle-nosed admiral, of a mind with them as to the paramount importance of any affair of honor, had unobtrusively seen to it that his unsuspecting comrades should at least have the option of remaining at liberty to keep their appointment with the supposed prince's friend. A hastily penciled note, marked "Instant and urgent," had reached the hands of Captain Castrique in the vestibule of the hotel, on his way to the elevator with Count Van Hoytema: and they had precipitately made off again after reading it, to spend the night as comfortably as might be elsewhere.

But Baxendale, knowing nothing of these wheels within wheels, and depending on Burdick, could only hope against hope that a new day would bring better news. . . . And this was what it brought: that it had indeed been the princess whom he had seen on Fifth Avenue, whom he had missed by no more than a matter of seconds and a cruelly ludicrous mischance!

He did not pause to ask himself what he, as the prince, would have said to her, or to consider how he might have compromised both himself and the man he was personating. All that mattered to him

was that he had lost his last opportunity of speech with her and a smile — He groaned aloud as he realized his helplessness in the close mesh of circumstances.

Ernst knocked, and entered with a coffee-service.

"An officer of the police has called, your highness," said he. "His business is urgent, he states."

"Show him in at once," ordered Baxendale in haste, sitting up again, collecting his scattered wits with a frantic effort.

"Well?" he demanded eagerly, as the plain-clothes policeman from whom the prince had escaped made his appearance. "Have you your man? Where is he? I'll come down as soon as I can get into my clothes, and bail him out."

"Sorry, sir," said the man disconsolately, "but — he got away — and I got a hammering." His appearance testified to the truth of the latter assertion.

"Did — er — Mr. Baxendale do that?" Baxendale asked very uneasily. He was not a little relieved when the maltreated officer shook his head.

"Had an accident — in the crowd," was the explanation. "They seemed to think it was my fault, and went for me. Mr. Baxendale got clean away before I could see about me again. I've been hunting him ever since, but —" The officer shook his head again. "So, I thought I'd better report to you, sir, since Mr. Burdick's gone out of town. But I haven't said a word to the department about it yet," he added uncomfortably, "because — of course, it

will go against me in there. And it's a thing that's never happened to me before."

"And no general alarm has been sent out?" Baxendale suggested, not sure whether to be thankful or the reverse for that oversight.

"Not officially," the policeman admitted. "But there isn't a patrolman on Manhattan Island who won't pull Mr. Baxendale in at sight. I put the wires all round him as soon as I could connect with a 'phone."

"That was the best way," Baxendale agreed, inwardly wondering how he himself would get on when he should at length change places again with the prince. He had no idea what further steps he should, or even could, take to that end. It was too late now to adopt the risky precaution of having Castrique and his accomplice arrested. He did not doubt, indeed, that the projected encounter had already taken place, for he knew that the prince was not one to let the grass grow under his feet in any affair of this sort. He made up his mind, since he had to decide so much on the spur of the moment, that he must await with what patience he could muster the outcome of events beyond his control.

"That was the best way, of course," he agreed. "Don't say a word about it to the department, but let me know the instant you have any word of him. Hand me over that roll of bills, will you, please?"

He tendered to his fellow-victim of evil fortune an efficacious plaster for all minor bodily hurts, and

the policeman's face brightened marvelously at sight of the note thus bestowed on him.

"I'll call you up, sir," he promised, "the minute I hear he's been held."

"And see that he's made comfortable then, till I turn up," Baxendale requested. "You needn't bear him any grudge, you know, because he got away from you. You'd have done the same yourself in his place."

"Sure thing!" assented the policeman, and, having saluted, he retired, much happier than he had been when he entered, through the dressing-room in which Professor Jocrisse had spent the night dozing on a couch.

Baxendale got disconsolately out of his comfortable bed, and sat for a time on its edge, idly dangling pyjama-clad legs, his mind in a maze, stunned by the blow fate had dealt him.

His princess had passed through New York yesterday! Passed through — and out of his life for all time — yesterday! And he had missed her by no more than a matter of seconds! That was the cruelest pinch of all. He threw himself back on the bed again, and, forgetting all else in his soreness of spirit, lay for a long time staring up at the ceiling, his teeth set between parted lips. Ernst, returning, discovered him thus, but he sat up at once then, his face impassive as usual.

"I'll breakfast in here," he said, casually. He felt that he could not endure the sight of Professor Jocrisse again till he had to some extent got over

his hurt. And he spent the morning there, dully awaiting whatever news might come next.

None came, and the hours began to hang very heavy on his hands. But he stayed where he was, smoking more than was good for him, pacing the room despondently with bent head, and hands clasped behind him.

It was four in the afternoon before he noticed the flight of time, and ordered Ernst to bring him the evening papers. He thought he might perhaps find in these some further news of interest to him. But Ernst, on his way to obtain them, was intercepted by a telegraph-messenger, and came back with a bulky envelope, which turned out to contain a long cablegram in cipher from his majesty, Juric's uncle. Baxendale had at first been inclined to let it lie unopened, but, on second thought, proceeded to carry out the prince's instructions for such a case.

Ernst brought him the code-book, kept under lock and key, and he sat down to unravel word by word the nonsensical-looking jumble of which it consisted. And, by the time he had got to the end of the first line, his whole appearance had changed; he was no longer the dejected misanthrope of the morning, tired of life's tangles, and only anxious to be done with it, but a very brisk, eager, alert young man, with everything to live for, and thankful to be alive. His eyes absolutely glowed again with the sheer *joie de vivre* as he translated, word by word, that wonderful message, and his fingers seemed to him all thumbs, while he turned with ever-growing agitation from page to

page of the code. When Ernst at length came back with the evening papers, he was dismissed with no more than an impatient nod. For the emperor's communication concerned none other than "your cousin, Ingrid of Marque."

An hour later, by which time Baxendale had got to the end of it, and had a clear enough transcript of its original form before him for proof that he was not dreaming, he threw himself back in his chair, and looked blindly, but smilingly, about him. Then, he rose, slowly, and once more fell to pacing the room, head up, arms tightly folded, pausing every now and then to refresh his memory from the penciled sheets on the table beside the code-book. He could scarcely yet believe that fickle Fortune was once more smiling so resplendently on him.

What the purple emperor had to say to his nephew, Juric of Jetland, was briefly this:

Your cousin, Ingrid of Marque, is now in America, on her way home from a trip around the world I allowed her to take prior to her approaching marriage with you. She will be in New York on Monday, and will call upon you at your hotel. You are to receive her with the utmost cordiality, and see her as often as you possibly can before the following Saturday, when you will return to Europe with her on the *Adriatic,* by which your passages have already been booked. During the homeward voyage you will pay her such attention that the news of your engagement, which will be announced throughout the civilized world before you land, will not surprise anyone. Your wedding will take place in the cathedral of her capital a month later. And, now, mark my words . . .

What followed was close on a couple of pages of warnings against daring further to disregard his majesty's thus clearly expressed and, from his own point of view, quite lawful commands; of still more explicit threats as to the dire and certain consequences that must ensue upon any further contumacy, overt or covert, on the prince's part. It was evident that his majesty was no longer to be trifled with, that Juric of Jetland would be very well advised to render him prompt and painstaking obedience in this, a matter of policy, presumably of the first importance to the welfare of the empire. But Baxendale paid very little attention to that diatribe, beyond making a mental note that it would at least afford him a sufficient excuse for any complaisance to the princess for which the prince might later on be inclined to call him to account. His interest lay chiefly in these talismanic words, "She will be in New York on Monday," and he could not be satisfied till he had checked them again by the code.

They stood that test, and therewith he gave himself up to the blissful dream they had brought him.

He was recalled from the clouds by the reappearance of the ubiquitous Ernst, and he hastily destroyed his translation of the emperor's cablegram, which he pocketed for safe-keeping till he could hand it over to its rightful recipient.

"His Excellency, the Baron Carquois, requests that your highness will accord him a few minutes' conversation," said Ernst, no less decorous always in his speech than in appearance. And Baxendale

nodded good-temperedly. He could have received even Captain Castrique without animus at that moment, and he wondered whether the baron might not be bringing him news of that brawler.

The Baron Carquois was visibly in a state of excitement. In one trembling hand, he held a pink evening paper, but whatever news he was bringing seemed to have become bottled up by the way. He spluttered so that he could not speak, and, at last, had to thrust the paper before Baxendale, one shaky finger wobbling all over its surface, as he attempted to point out in print what it was that had so perturbed him.

Baxendale took the news-sheet, a good deal alarmed by the nobleman's evident agitation, and, while the obese little baron recovered his breath and his natural color, was not a little relieved himself to learn that his first quick fear was unfounded. He had conceived the idea that Juric of Jetland had come to harm at the hands of Captain Castrique, and that the reporters as well as the police — not to mention the Baron Carquois himself — were now in possession of that almost priceless secret, on the preservation of which depended his present hope of seeing the princess again.

He was not a little relieved to read a long and highly colored account, still hot from the wires and the presses, of how Juric's cousin, Ughtred of Utgard, the prince imperial, had at last revolted against the purple emperor's despotic disposition of his matrimonial future, had finally

and irrevocably refused to wed the somewhat sharp-featured and blunt-tempered lady to whom he had been forcibly and without his consent engaged on a formal footing for a twelve-month, had abdicated, no less formally and for all time, his high rank and position: and, as if to make assurance doubly sure in the last direction, had forthwith married a very handsome and shapely gipsy who, for a twelve-month past, had been scandalizing the emperor's capital from the Parnassus Café, where she had apparently danced her way into the ex-prince imperial's heart.

"Phew!" whistled Baxendale, scrutinizing with up-lifted eyebrows a photograph of the fair Bacchante, whose twinkling heels had been responsible for this upheaval. And, to himself, he whispered: "This will make his majesty hopping mad. There's no help for Juric now." The reflection in no wise added to his recently returned good-humor. On the contrary, he felt that the Baron Carquois should be snubbed for his indecent haste to spread such unpalatable tidings.

"But, your highness — you — your royal and imperial highness," stammered the baron, as Baxendale threw the paper down with a curt expression of thanks. And at these words, Baxendale became aware of the real significance of those far-away happenings, of the mistake he had almost made. There flashed across his memory a fact, which he had almost forgotten: that Juric of Jetland stood next to his cousin Ughtred in indirect line of succession to

the purple emperor's throne. And Juric of Jetland was now, therefore, the prince imperial.

"Your royal and imperial highness," stammered the baron, again.

But Baxendale cut the man short, with a gesture of reproof.

"Am I to be raised in rank by a mere newspaper canard?" he asked. "This is ill news, if it be true. Till we know for certain that it is true, I remain as I am. But thanks for drawing my attention to it."

The baron was abashed, but, none the less, bowed himself out backward, a careful courtier, if a little awkward at that unaccustomed exercise. And in the dressing-room he paused to enlighten the indefatigable Professor Jocrisse as to the momentous change in prospect.

Alone, Baxendale picked up the paper again, in search of any other information it might contain. But he could find none, although more concerning the imperial imbroglio was promised for the morrow.

"See our Sunday Edition for further startling particulars as to the purple emperor's policy," said *The American Eagle*, and in one corner, no doubt hastily set up at the last moment, in bold type: "Where is the purple emperor's new heir-apparent? You will be surprised to hear. Our Sunday Edition will tell you. Buy it, and read in 'A Royal Romance' how America is helping to make European history. Exclusive to *The American Eagle*."

Baxendale was still studying this with an apprehensive frown, when another cablegram from the emperor came in. It confirmed in bitter terms what the paper before him had already reported, and did not lack additional warnings and threats against following Prince Ughtred's insane example. "Your every action will be promptly reported to me: and, for the last time," it wound up ominously, "I bid you beware." With that, Baxendale began to be not a little alarmed, for himself as well as for the inconsequent friend, as to whose whereabouts he had not the least idea, and whom he now scarcely expected to see again for several days.

Nor was his discomposure in the least lessened by a telegram he received an hour later from Burdick, saying shortly:

"Sorry cannot possibly hold your story over after to-morrow morning. Hope everything has turned out all right."

"Seems to me as if I had let myself in for the time of my life during the next few days!" he told himself lugubriously, and then forgot again all his troubles, past and prospective, in fond anticipation of the sovereign balm that Monday would surely bring him.

He did not leave his room, but dined there alone, and sat by the fire the long night through, counting the slow hours since he could not sleep. But, although he did not close his eyes, he dreamed all the time — of a royal romance; and the trend of his dreams he put into words, unconsciously, as he

at length rose to switch off the light, and let the dawn of a new day in.

"*Coeur vaillant fait royaume,*" said he to himself, defiantly. "And — why should she not perhaps be willing to do for me what Ughtred of Utgard has done for a café-dancer?"

CHAPTER TWELVE

A ROYAL ROMANCE

NEW YORK society was shaken almost to its foundations — which, as all the world knows very well, are of solid gold and quite earthquake-proof — by the sensational fulfillment of *The American Eagle's* promise to surprise its Sunday readers: for *The American Eagle* counts among its four hundred thousand select subscribers most of the Four Hundred, not to mention their shadows and satellites, or those disconcerting comets which, every now and then, flash into the highest heavens — and out again.

And, when the Four Hundred, not to mention these lesser luminaries, had read through to the last amazing line of "A Royal Romance," by Lester Burdick, all they could do till they got their breaths again was to sit and stare at each other. They could scarcely bring themselves to believe that his royal highness, the prince imperial of the purple empire, had been living in their midst for nearly a week without their having known anything at all about it.

Lester Burdick's story did not, therefore, con-

cern that socially dead dog, Ughtred of Utgard, of whose reckless doings they had read with no more than a shake of the head the day before, but was entirely devoted to the living lion, who would one day, if he lived and the purple emperor died, occupy that august autocrat's place of power; and to the touching romance of the new prince imperial's proper passion for his fair cousin, Her Highness of Marque and the Lesser Isles, in pursuit of whom, said *The American Eagle,* he had come to America.

New York Society knew, of course, that her highness had passed through that city the Friday before, had even commented unfavorably on the fact that she had passed through otherwise unheralded, and had not stopped to be entertained. But the brief paragraph in Saturday's paper had not attracted further attention than that. Many notabilities pass through New York. And who could have foretold what the following forty-eight hours had brought forth!

The Four Hundred, staringly, saw in one another's eyes the dawn and growth of resolve to make the most of the opportunity that remained. The prince imperial was still at the St. Regulus. His sweetheart would be in New York again on Monday. New York Society made up its mind that neither should now have any cause of complaint against it on the score of inhospitality to such a charming young couple. One or two of Baxendale's friends and acquaintances, recalling some half-forgotten hear-say that he had been on intimate

terms with Juric of Jetland in Europe, wondered where he had so inconveniently disappeared to, and wished fervently that he would turn up again in New York.

But that individual, still virtually a prisoner in his room at the big hotel on Fifth Avenue — Professor Jocrisse had not for a moment failed at his post in the room adjoining, and the other door of the bedroom was always locked — that individual had really been no less disconcerted than they by the revelations of *The American Eagle's* Sunday Edition, which he had read before his friends and acquaintances had even opened their eyes, and shut them again for their beauty-sleep.

"The fat's in the fire now, all right," was his whispered comment on Lester Burdick's exclusive information as to that romance, which had been manufactured in an imperial palace by a white-bearded old despot, whose dreams were now solely of protocols and questions of state, and had no humanity in them.

The newspaper story was simply another link in the chain with which the purple emperor was seeking to shackle Juric of Jetland to the triumphal chariot of his policies. It pulled to the ground all those castles that Baxendale had been building for the princess and himself throughout the dark hours. The shock of their downfall left him once more stunned for a time and unable to think.

But, sitting before the fire with a single sheet of the Sunday paper on his knees, there grew by

degrees in his mind a fierce and unreasoning anger against the old schemer, who had so cunningly forged the chain that was to trammel three lives. Now, anger stirred him to enterprise. He felt that he could no longer sit still there, and let matters drift, carrying him — a free man still, in spite of the net of circumstances — with them to the end appointed by another man. Till Juric should return to take up again the thread of his own affairs, he would represent Juric faithfully, and, after that — was there any risk, no matter how rash, he would not gladly run in pursuit of his own audacious ideal? Its audacity no longer daunted him. Was Ughtred of Utgard's gipsy of any better mettle than he?

A cold bath and a hot breakfast put still more heart into him, and, while Ernst was busy over his elaborate toilette, his high resolve assumed a more concrete shape. As Juric of Jetland, he told himself, he would urge his suit on the Princess Ingrid as soon as she should appear, and, if she were of that weak, pliable disposition which was to be coerced into marrying any man who might come along, he would at least have paved the way effectually for his absent friend. But, by this and by that — and herein lay the crux of the crisis for him — he had almost come to accept it for fact that Her Highness of Marque and the Lesser Isles was no more likely to brook, and no less likely to resent by every means at her command, than he himself would have been in her place the emperor's inter-

ference in what was, on the broad basis of humanity at least, her own most personal and intimate concern. And, if she were neither to be coaxed by Juric of Jetland nor coerced by the old, white-bearded plotter, who had planned in his medieval palace such a very modern master-stroke as that in the Sunday paper, what might she not have to say, after all, to a certain greatly daring —

His meditations were once more interrupted. The Baron Carquois begged to be received, and was duly admitted by Ernst. The Baron Carquois begged pardon for his intrusion, and further begged to inform his royal and imperial highness that his royal and imperial majesty's — "

"Oh, cut all that cackle and come to the horses!" Baxendale begged in turn, and translated that into more polite terms in the baron's own language, but without effect.

"His royal and imperial majesty's ambassador in the United States of America," concluded the verbose baron, unable, seemingly, to forego his fondness for full-length styles and titles, "has just arrived from Washington, to pay his respects to your royal and imperial highness."

"I'll be through in ten minutes," said Baxendale. "Entertain him till then with a good cigar — there's a box in the anteroom — and some sensible conversation."

The baron bowed himself out decorously as far as the threshold, where he tripped, and would have fallen backward through the doorway, had not

Ernst, with a gravity admirable under the circumstances, caught him in time to keep him right end up. He came back a few minutes later, to announce a newspaper reporter, whom Baxendale put off till the afternoon; and, again, before Ernst had this pseudo-prince turned out in such shape as he thought should safely pass even the lynx-eyed ambassador, with word of a Mr. Wood B. Smart, first and foremost of many like him who sent in their cards that day.

"Tell him I'm not receiving," said Baxendale; and he went through toward the anteroom, to hear what the ambassador might have to say. It had not been a part of his bargain with Juric of Jetland that he should undertake any such interviews, but in his new-found independence of spirit he would have faced even the purple emperor without flinching.

Major-General Mandarin and Rear-Admiral Agassiz rose respectfully as he passed through the parlor, shadowed at a safe distance by the always more alert Professor Jocrisse. The bottle-nosed admiral had almost blushed, as he was asked whether there was yet any news of the two absentees of the suite — for the prince imperial was, as you will readily understand, a vastly more important personage in his eyes than the mere Prince of Jetland, and the admiral would not now have dared repeat the trick he had played. But, luckily for himself in this instance, Rear-Admiral Agassiz' countenance was one perennial blush, and Baxendale did not

notice the signs of confusion with which he made halting answer in the negative.

"I just hope Juric hasn't gone and shot that infernal fellow Castrique!" thought Baxendale, on the threshold of the anteroom. "I've plenty to answer the police for already, without having to defend a manslaughter charge. And who's going to bail *me* out, after Juric's gone back to Europe, I'd like to know!"

The Baron Carquois cut short these misgivings by means of an elaborate and lengthy presentation of the ambassador, an elegant, elderly diplomat, whom Baxendale greeted with that grave cordiality he had seen Juric display on occasion toward another such Machiavellian visitor at his palace in Jetland. For he very shrewdly suspected that all he now said or did, or was even supposed to be thinking, would in due course be reported to the purple emperor by this very innocent-looking gray-haired gentleman.

But the ambassador was, of course, too finished a go-between to antagonize at the outset the younger man of the two on whom his own future career depended, and he was soon making himself most agreeable to Baxendale. He had been long enough in America to have imbibed something of the local disregard of punctilio for its own sake, and Baxendale found his company a change for the better after forty-eight hours of the prolix Baron Carquois, Ernst, the always correct, and the unnecessarily laconic professor, now keeping his fellows company in the parlor.

The ambassador, on the other hand, was finding his host by no means so black as his imperial employer had painted that young man to him. A cigar had been pressed on him, and he did not refuse the offer of a matutinal cocktail. They chatted together most amicably for half an hour, and then the astute ambassador began to fence for an opening through which he might come at some understanding as to the prince imperial's views on the emperor's all-important and most pressing plans for his early marriage. Since the day before, his majesty had driven the ambassador almost distracted with cipher cablegrams on that subject, and, if only for his own sake, he felt bound to promote his majesty's project by every means in his power.

But he soon began to see that he had met his match, in the art of begging the question at least, in the pleasant-spoken and outwardly imperturbable youth in the arm-chair opposite him. The utmost he could glean as to that youth's sentiments was that, until the princess should have had her say in the matter, it would be premature in the extreme to discuss it at all.

"And, looking at it from the other side, marquis," said Baxendale carelessly, "there's this to be said: You wouldn't have engaged yourself to marry *madame la marquise* without ever even having seen her — now would you? That sort of thing isn't done nowadays — not in civilized countries, at any rate."

The ambassador bowed concurrence, inwardly

much embarrassed by such a bold statement of fact — fact, moreover, that might almost be taken as calling in question his imperial master's methods and policy. But he could by no means controvert it, and having come to a similar conversational *cul-de-sac* in several other directions by which, from time to time, he sought to approach again the real object of his errand there, he gave it up for the present, and rose to go.

"I may cable his majesty that I have found you well, and well-disposed toward the alliance he is so anxious, for reasons of state, to arrange for your imperial highness?" he asked, displaying his hand a little, at last.

"You may cable his majesty any message you please, on your own account," said Baxendale bluntly, glad to be done with finesse. "Put yourself in my place for a moment, marquis, and you'll understand at once how I feel about it. Better wait till I've seen her highness of Marque, and I'll tell you how I feel then. By the way, do you happen to know where she is to-day?"

"I don't," the ambassador admitted frankly. "As a matter of fact, her arrival yesterday was a surprise to me. She wasn't due here from San Francisco until to-morrow. To-morrow night will still suit us for the reception I spoke of?"

"It will suit me all right, since you say there's no help for it," said Baxendale, with a somewhat wry smile. "But — I was much more comfortable here, my dear marquis, before — "

The ambassador beamed on him: he was basing great hopes on the outcome of that reception, at which the prince imperial was to set eyes for the first time on his cousin, Ingrid of Marque — it had been his own idea.

"Ah! my dear prince," he returned, shaking his gray head, and shrugging his shoulders, "your high rank brings also heavy responsibilities. They gall one's shoulders a little at first. I can understand and sympathize with you, believe me. And, now, I must be off. I am at your imperial highness's service, and you will command me as you see fit. *Madame la marquise* will be honored if you will dine with us one night at our hotel. But that and all other details I shall submit for your gracious approval at another opportunity. Meantime, may I bid your imperial highness good-morning?"

Baxendale was well-enough pleased, on the whole, with the upshot of that interview, although he would not, perhaps, have been so well pleased could he have overheard the whispered conference now taking place between the ambassador and Professor Jocrisse in the parlor and the professor's one-sided report of that most unfortunate incident in the Fifth Avenue store.

"A very erratic, strong-willed young man," concluded Professor Jocrisse, in dolorous accents. "But for the forcible measures I took at once, he would assuredly have escaped us."

"On your head be it, then, that he is safely restrained against any further such impulse," returned

the ambassador. "Failure in the discharge of your duties will entail unpleasant consequences, professor, while his majesty is not niggardly in rewarding successful service." With this sufficiently broad hint, he went back to his temporary quarters at the Plaza and to a very busy day indeed.

And Baxendale soon found that his day, too, was fated to be no less busy. He was still congratulating himself on having so effectively disposed of the subtle ambassador, who had, furthermore, accepted him without question at the artificial face-value contrived by the no less crafty Ernst, when his untiring master of the household, the Baron Carquois, came in to inquire at what hour it would please him to receive a deputation of the purple emperor's loyal subjects resident in New York, who desired to render him reverence on his accession to imperial rank.

"If I might suggest that your royal and imperial highness should condescend to appear in uniform this afternoon — say from three to four — at an informal levée, that would greatly gratify all concerned," said the baron.

"All right," agreed Baxendale carelessly, since he was prepared to play out his part with a princely disregard of personal inclinations; "all right. Let 'em all come. And, if you think they'd like me any better in breeches and boots, so be it."

"There are, also, newspaper interviewers, both men and women, innumerable," the baron announced, uncertainly.

"I'll see them in a bunch, between four-thirty and five."

"And the quantities of cards that are coming in for your royal and imperial highness?"

"Hand them on to the ambassador, when he calls again. He'll tell you what's to be done in return. I haven't time to attend to them."

Nor was Baxendale at fault in that final excuse. He had remarkably little time to attend even to himself throughout the long afternoon, during which, once more in the pomp and panoply of the prince's most gorgeous full dress, and attended by his diminished, but no less resplendent, suite, he received at the dais in the overcrowded chamber of audience one deputation after another, men, women and children, of every possible sort and condition, who stared at him as though he had been a stuffed figure while they struggled past, or wrung his hand with republican fervor till it was so sore that the least touch was painful to him, and he finally had to hide it from them behind his back. His evening was complicated by another visit from the ambassador with a staff of clerks, a hasty revision of the cards received, and all the arrangements to be made for the morrow's more ceremonious reception of the Four Hundred, multiplied by ten. There were, too, a dozen other interruptions, the penalties of the high place he held, which he could by no means escape. He would scarcely have believed that a stranger within the gates of that cosmopolitan city could have attracted as much attention as was now being bestowed on him. But *The*

American Eagle's surprising disclosures, under the catching caption of "A Royal Romance," seemed to have suddenly made him the most popular young man in America; and popularity has its price. When he at last got to bed, almost overwhelmed by the events of the day, it was after midnight — and he had not slept at all the night before. As soon as his head touched the pillow, he closed his heavy eyes, and murmured rapturously to himself:

"I'll see her again — to-day!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"QUI S' EXCUSE —"

"HIS royal and imperial highness is not perhaps in the best of tempers," the Baron Carquois admitted, despondently.

"Worse than a black bear, with a sore head!" affirmed Professor Jocrisse, less courtier-like in his language.

The suite, or as many of its members as remained — Captain Castrique and Count Van Hoytema were still absent from their posts on Monday evening — was at dinner, while Baxendale in his anteroom had contemned the meal set for him in favor of pacing to and fro, in a frame of mind such as might almost have been held to justify the plain-spoken professor's comparison.

But, in common fairness to Baxendale, it must be remembered that the day had been a most trying one. His experience of Sunday had been repeated in a double dose, compressed into the hours between ten in the morning and six, when he had, in despair, ordered the Baron Carquois to take instant steps to have all visitors politely cleared out and excluded, till it should be time to admit his invited guests to

the full-dress levée arranged by the ambassador for their due introduction.

It had been a most trying day, and, although he had every moment been expecting word of the princess's arrival, the dinner-hour had come round without any sign of her. Hope deferred had made him still more irritable. He was already dressed for the reception, and eager beyond expression to have speech with her before the incursion of the Four Hundred, ten times multiplied, should make it quite impossible for him to meet her on any but the most formal footing.

He ate a cutlet, and swallowed a glass of wine, with difficulty; then he lighted a cigarette, and took to tramping the floor again, till he found that his cavalry boots and spurs were not adapted for that exercise, and threw himself into a chair with an exclamation of fierce impatience.

This had scarcely passed his lips when he was aware of a light tap at the double doors that led to the audience-chamber, and from between these Ernst emerged, decorated with the gold chain of office, which he had been wearing at intervals all day in his occasional capacity of groom of the chambers. And, at sight of him, Baxendale got hurriedly to his feet.

"The Countess Considine has charged me to inquire whether your imperial highness will condescend to receive her," said Ernst in a low tone, and with a furtive glance in the direction of the other door, which temporarily shut out the pertinacious professor.

Baxendale made no reply at all to this ceremonious request — he had already instructed Ernst as to the procedure to be strictly observed in case any lady should ask to see him in private, and personally as he had ventured to hope that the princess might — but tiptoed in his stiff boots toward the curtained double doorway, and passed through. Ernst remained in the anteroom, where, he hoped, he might be most useful, occasionally rattling a knife and fork for the professor's edification. He did not expect that the suite would rise from their table in the room adjoining for another hour at least, since he had ordered his underlings not to hurry their service unduly, but he was not sure that the professor might not take it into his head to peep into the anteroom in that interval. Ernst Coicu did not care much for Professor Jocrisse, and had, on the other hand, a great liking for Baxendale.

Baxendale bowed very graciously to the very pleasant and young-looking matron, in a most elaborate evening toilette under an opera-cloak, whom he had last seen in the studio at the princess's seaside villa on one of the lesser isles that own allegiance to Marque, who was now curtsying so humbly before him that all he could see of her for the moment was a pretty pair of plump, white shoulders, and the top of a curly head.

He held out his hand in a hurry to raise her, and she kissed it dutifully, as etiquette demanded. Then, she stood erect again, unaided, since he had involuntarily withdrawn his hand, and raised her eyes to his.

They were very bright, roguish eyes, he thought.

"You are most welcome, countess," said Baxendale warmly, as she seemed to be waiting for him to speak, "and especially here, so far from home."

"Your imperial highness is very kind," the countess returned. "I am here only as a messenger from Her Highness, the Princess Ingrid — I am one of her maids of honor. Her highness is now in New York, and has directed me to ask whether it would be convenient to your imperial highness that she should visit you here for a few minutes informally before the hour set for the reception, a card for which has just reached her through his majesty's ambassador for the United States."

Under his breath, Baxendale was consigning to the nether regions the formal phraseology that still obtains among the many courts of the purple empire, and wastes so much precious time.

"I'm all impatience to meet her highness," he asserted, without any beating about the bush. "Can you tell me how soon she could be here?"

"Almost immediately, I imagine," the countess ventured to affirm, "if your imperial highness will permit me to return to her with that most gracious message."

And Baxendale was not slow at all in speeding her on the way. He called Ernst from the anteroom, and had her conducted forth again with all due ceremony, but without an instant's delay. Then, he himself returned to the anteroom, and, summoning Professor Jocrisse, gave that suspicious custodian to

understand very distinctly that he must not be disturbed on any pretext whatsoever, not even by so much as a single peep of espial on the said professor's part, until the hour appointed for the forthcoming levée; he further promised that he would not stray beyond the bounds of the anteroom and the audience-chamber during that period of time, and, the professor having grudgingly agreed to accept his parole again to that extent, and cautioning the other gentlemen of the suite in similar terms against intruding on his privacy, he left them to go on with their dinner, and wonder what had occurred to chase the clouds from his brow; for Ernst had seen to it that they should know nothing of any private and personal visitors whom he might see fit to admit.

Time seemed to Baxendale to have stopped entirely until, at length, and not very many minutes after the Countess Considine had gone off on her errand, Ernst knocked again at the double doors, and drew the curtains apart that Baxendale might pass through into the brilliantly lighted audience-chamber.

He first caught sight of her, his princess, in one of the many mirrors about the room; it might have been — indeed, it was the same in which he had first seen himself as Juric of Jetland, in the dashing uniform he was wearing now. He felt, for the first time, a little ashamed of himself and the part he must play toward her, as he strode forward, spurs ringing.

She had had her hands at her hair, and turned

toward him in that pose, charmingly unconscious of having been caught in such a very natural and feminine attitude. And she stood where she was — an unforgettable picture in the white evening-gown, which showed her no less white neck and shoulders a little, between the folds of the great fur wrap in which she had come to him through the keen night air — regarding him with gravely observant eyes as he crossed the floor, a very gallant figure himself, as he could not but notice in the mirror, behind her now. He would have given the world at that moment if, in exchange, he might have remained Prince of Jetland.

He held out his hand, absolutely unable to speak, and, as he stopped before her, she stooped over it in a curtsey such as even the Countess Considine could not have accomplished. And he, looking down at that fair, bowed head for an instant, felt almost irresistibly tempted to lift her into his arms, and hold her fast there, for himself, against all the princes and powers who might claim her from him. But, instead, he lifted her slender hand to his lips, and held it there, for a moment, no more, as she stood upright again.

"I have been expecting you all day, cousin," he said simply, in a voice that shook a little in spite of himself, "and — the day has been a long one."

She smiled. He could almost hear his heart beating, and very fast. He had so often dreamed of that rare, sweet smile.

"But why, cousin?" she asked, and her tones fell on his ear like remembered music long mute. "Why

has the day been long? You have surely spent many days well content without sight of me! Or, if they, too, were long, was not Marque nearer Jetland than is New York?"

"You have seen the papers, then, and what they say?" he questioned, confused.

"Only this afternoon. Are you responsible for the information contained in 'A Royal Romance'?"

"Not I, cousin," he assured her, glad of that opportunity to exculpate himself; "no more responsible for that than for poor Ughtred's downfall. But will you not sit down here with me for a while, and tell of your travels? You have had a long holiday. What is the world like around on the other side?"

She laid a light hand on his arm, and he led her across the spacious chamber to that alcove within which he had awakened to the life he was living now — for a few days. And he had to remind himself that it was only for a few days, in case the enchantment of her presence should quite undermine his self-control. He must play his hard part out honorably, since he had allowed himself to be cast for it. He must remember that he was Juric of Jetland for the time being, and put Bolter Baxendale and his heartaches out of his head. But the silken rustle of the girl at his side would surely have bewitched even an anchorite.

She sank into one corner of the comfortable couch in the alcove, and he seated himself as near her white skirts as he dared, leaning back on one elbow, that

he might the better glance into her eyes every now and again. But she had a fan at her service, and bade him, moreover, switch out a light overhead, so that she also could command a convenient shadow; and out of this she regarded him gravely again, for a moment.

"You think Ughtred was not well treated by the emperor?" she inquired, quite ignoring his break from that delicate subject, and he shrugged his shoulders as Juric might have done in such case. He would much rather have known what she thought herself, before expressing any opinion of his.

"I don't think he was," he answered, however, recalling the proverb that honesty is the best policy. "I don't feel sure that, had I been in his place, I'd have been at all inclined to carry out his majesty's most arbitrary commands. A man, even though he has the misfortune to have been born in the purple, is surely entitled to some say concerning the most important step of his life — and a woman, too," he added as an after-thought, regarding her gravely in his turn, as he committed himself to that temerarious statement.

She weighed it in her mind, and also its personal application.

"But it would be very awkward if we all married — gipsies, wouldn't it?" she asked, as if anxious for the information.

"Is that the only alternative to be allowed us?" he countered. "Are we all so foolish that any freedom of choice should be absolutely denied us? Are

you ready, cousin, to — to obey the emperor's orders in your own case?"

She flushed a little as he put forward that last sledge-hammer argument in support of his way of thinking. But she was no less straightforward than he had been.

"In my own case, I should certainly claim an exception," she told him with cool unconcern, as the rose-tint died out of her face, and his heart leaped wildly again at the words. He had scarcely dared to hope that she would so frankly agree with him, and the vista of possibilities opened up by her virtual declaration of independence was almost too dazzling to be believed without further proof of its reality.

"But do you think that claim would be allowed?" he demanded, as if he had been discussing some question impersonal to them both. "His majesty has a good deal of faith in the divine right of kings to order the lives of their subjects as they may see fit. There are modern equivalents for the medieval dungeon and torture-chamber. Liberty is sweet, but is not life sweeter?"

She looked at him, a little disdainfully, he thought.

"Have you forgotten the old motto of Marque?" she retorted, her clear eyes holding his. "'I break but I do not bend,' may be no less true to-day than it was before the purple empire had ever been heard of."

He laughed happily, so light was his heart as he realized, at last, that she was no more likely to

lay down the arms taken up in her own just cause than was Juric of Jetland his; that not even the metaphorical rack and thumbscrew, with which the purple emperor would no doubt seek to compel her to his cherished purpose, had any terrors for her. He knew now that Juric of Jetland would have to win her if he wanted her, and that, too, under the heavy handicap of the affront to her proper maidenly pride involved in the emperor's attempt to dispose of her as though she had been some inanimate chattel of his. And, if Juric of Jetland should not, after all, succeed, might not Bolter Baxendale try a last foolhardy fall with fortune! He laughed happily, and his laugh seemed to be infectious, for she smiled back at him from behind her fan.

"But you mustn't make fun of my motto," she said, suddenly serious again. "It may seem amusing to you, but —"

"I wasn't laughing at that," he made haste to assure her, "but at the thought of what his majesty would look like, if he could hear us. And now, having mutually refused to let him interfere between us, we need not, surely, let that shadow darken the sky again. Tell me, cousin,"— he took his courage into both hands, and leaped boldly, because his time was so short —"if I had come to you in Marque on my own account as a most humble suitor for your favor, would you have refused to receive me? Would you have turned such a beggar away from your gates with empty hands?"

She shook her head silently, a little alarmed, per-

haps, by his hardihood, by the reckless, irresistible spirit which, in spite of himself, would gaze out hungrily at her from behind his eyes. She had shrunk a little into her corner.

"You did not come," she said softly, "and — I do not know. How can I answer you otherwise?"

He leaned a little toward her. His teeth were set. He was going to leap again, and into such darkness as had almost daunted him. But he did not hesitate.

"Is it too late now," he asked in a low, tense tone, "to hope that I may not always have to live alone?"

She shook her head again, and the long lashes hid from him her wistful eyes.

"There are other women in the world," she reminded him, as if to soften her refusal of his belated entreaty, "and, surely, one among them will gladly give you what I cannot."

"It is too late, then?" he whispered, his heart torn between hope and fear for himself, since she would have none of his friend. But she would not answer further, and sat toying with her fan for a time, avoiding his anxious glance, while he sat silent, calling together again all his sadly scattered mental resources, mustering up his courage for that last blind leap, which still lay between him and such happiness as made him dizzy to contemplate and such misery as must assuredly end him. He had done his utmost for Juric of Jetland, and now —

He heaved a sigh, as if for the cause that was lost.

"I wish I had gone to Marque when I might," he said at length, with a decent assumption of sorrow, and then, in a lighter tone, meant as earnest to her that he would at least suffer his unfortunate lot without outward repining: "I had a friend staying with me in Jetland last winter who went on there for a week or two in the spring. He was an American, curiously enough, since fate has willed that we should meet in America — and too late. His name was Baxendale."

"An artist?" she asked, her eyelashes lifting again, and he nodded affirmation.

"I met him," she said, at once. "In fact, he painted my portrait while he was there. We saw a good deal of him."

"How did you happen to meet him?" inquired Baxendale, seeing his way ahead a little more clearly, and not slow to follow it.

"Oh, purely by chance," the princess returned, flushing faintly again. "I don't believe — do you know? — that he was ever properly introduced. But there was an American girl, a countrywoman of his, with me when we came across him among the woods at his easel, and they seemed to make friends quite naturally at once. The Americans are much less formal than their forefathers, I think."

"Aha!" exclaimed Baxendale, archly. "This sounds to me very much like the first chapter of a romance: the poor painter surprised at his easel in the wild woodland, by not only one but two of the fairest damsels in Marque. Did you notice whether

he instantly fell in love with his countrywoman, cousin? Or, you don't mean to tell me that he dared to raise his presumptuous regard to the proud princess herself!"

He did not for a moment take his eyes from the princess's face, into which the uncontrollable color was creeping ever more warmly. She had sought refuge again behind her fan from his shrewd glance, and was striving to appear as unconcerned as he seemed to be, though his heart was thumping so hard that it hurt him. He knew now all he needed to know, for his blind leap had brought him out of the darkness into a bewildering blaze of light.

But he would not at once believe the evidence of his own eyes, the vivid signs of confusion so visible in spite of all his royal lady-love's efforts to screen them from him.

"And the proud princess?" he demanded, relentlessly. "Ah! cousin, is that why Juric of Jetland has come too late?"

He rose, lest he should yet forget the part he was playing, and so break his promise of absolute secrecy to his friend, and turned away from her for a moment, lest the new light in his eyes should betray that sweet secret in spite of him. For she had not denied his direct impeachment. During that moment, he looked, unafraid, into the paradise to whose very gates his daring had brought him.

But he could go no further then, and, as soon as he had regained some measure of self-control, he turned back toward the princess, to offer such amends

as he might for having made her blush. He did not make the mistake of seeking to palliate his offense, but plunged at once into that aspect of the affair which chiefly affected himself.

"You must let the emperor blame me alone when the time comes, cousin," he said, in his most masterful tone, "for the overthrow of his scheme concerning us. I'm quite accustomed, you see, to being barked at by him, and he'll cool down again in due course. But, just at first, he'll be apt to try to bite as well as bark. So, when you get back to Marque, you'd better be too tired after your travels to visit him at the capital, and leave me a month or two in which to make him see reason, before you turn up there."

She, also, seemed to have recovered her composure, and smiled bravely up at him as she answered:

"I shall not shelter myself behind anyone. So far as I am concerned, his majesty is welcome to hear all the facts of the case, as soon as may be. But I thank you, none the less, for your generous offer."

"You will count me your friend in any case," he begged, knowing intuitively that she was not to be turned from her right resolve, "and not as a matter of form alone. If you ever stand in need of a faithful friend, fair cousin, and don't call on me, I'll feel that I have offended you past all forgiveness."

She got up and came out into the light with a happy little laugh.

"If I ever lack a faithful friend," she assured him,

"I feel sure I'll always know where to find one. And, now, cousin, I feel no less sure that time is flying. It is very good of you to have received me thus in advance of my fellow-guests, and I'm much happier now that we understand each other. It will save any awkwardness between us when we meet before his majesty's ambassador — and the rest of the world."

He took a hand of hers into both of his, and held it there, loath to let her go even for the hour that must intervene before he should see her again. And she let her hand lie in his for a blissful moment, looking levelly into his eyes, till at last he had to let his glance drop from hers, in case she should read in it more than he might yet honorably convey to her. He had lifted her hand to his lips before she could release it, and with that she turned to go.

Baxendale called Ernst reluctantly, though he knew it were unwise to detain her, and Ernst escorted her toward the doorway in the paneling at one side of the dais. From its threshold, she looked back at Baxendale, and smiling most bewitchingly, disappeared.

With the haunting memory of that smile to hearten him for the tasks still to be accomplished before he could put his own most amazing fortune to any further test, he sauntered back to the anteroom, and sat down there to think over the almost inconceivable change a few fleeting minutes had wrought in his life. That stolen interview had been sweet, inexpressibly. It had opened up for him a prospect of

happiness such as he could scarcely yet believe to be possible. And, withal, he was able to assure himself that he had not in any particular failed his absent friend, and that he had come so far through his own difficulties with absolute self-respect. He did not seek to delude himself into the comfortable belief that these difficulties were done with, but neither was he disposed to fear that any the future might bring forth would prove insurmountable. He would face the purple emperor, if need be, when the time came to take that momentous step. And, for the present — till midnight on Wednesday, when he must render to Juric of Jetland account of his stewardship — he was surely entitled to make the most he might of the golden hours. In an hour, or a little more at the most, he would see his princess again, and —

"Oh, Mr. Baxendale!" cried a broken voice from the doorway of the audience-chamber. As he sprang up, startled almost beyond expression, Ernst staggered into the room, hands uplifted in his sore distress of mind, all etiquette utterly forgotten. "Oh, Mr. Baxendale!" cried Ernst, "the prince is dead — killed in a duel — Captain Castrique — Oh, my God! What are we to do?"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE PURPLE EMPEROR

UNDER the afternoon sun, the surface of Lake Nahuel Huapi lay warm and still, blue and unclouded as the sky above. No sound disturbed its sequestered silence. There was no sign of life or movement anywhere, till, from a corner within which lay, hidden by the low buttresses of rock on either hand, a little natural harbor, shot a swift birch-bark canoe, which held a course skirting along its southern shore so smoothly that it was scarcely noticeable under the shadow of the woodland there.

It crept out of the shadow of the woodland, rounded a miniature cape beyond which lay only brush-clad sand-hills, studded with, here and there, a clump of trees, lifting their heads as though with a great effort out of the tangled thickets that helped to shut this wilderness off from the world. It held in toward the beach there. Two boys sprang out of it, one taller than the other, but both shapely as to build, belted and clad for country work in serviceable knickerbockers, gaiters and moccasins, and wearing broad-brimmed slouch hats. They drew their light craft high and dry, took from each a light bamboo

pole with a butterfly-net at the end, slung a very workmanlike japanned specimen-case on one shoulder, and set out over the sand-hills, laughing gleefully, glancing about them with alert, quick eyes.

"It's too late in the season to expect very much," one informed the other, after they had been struggling through the brush for some little time without so much as the sight of a single pair of painted wings to encourage them. But, almost at the words, a gorgeous butterfly, startled by their approach, rose from amid the tangle just ahead, fluttered and poised provokingly about them for a moment, while they made futile efforts toward its capture, and then, as if at last possessed by some foreboding of the fate that threatened, made off at its best speed, straight for the nearest clump of trees.

It would have been quite useless to match their legs against its wings over that broken ground, with all the wild growth to impede them. They followed it as quietly as they could, hoping that it might alight somewhere not too far off in its mad flight.

It did so, but, at first, they could not quite see where, and they stalked it like Indians, till one of them at length flushed it again, at the near edge of a sandy hollow, and scrambled down into this, and up the other slope again at speed, net poised.

Among the bushes at the upper edge of the bank opposite, the fugitive came down as if exhausted, the light net streaming after it, and, with its wings prisoned under the filmy folds, it lay still, captured.

"I've got it," cried a joyful, breathless voice, "and, oh, I do believe — yes, look at it — I've caught the purple emperor, at last!"

"I wonder how he'll like to find himself in the same box with the Painted Lady," another gay voice called back. "Chloroform the old wretch as quickly as possible. We don't need to be as cruel to him as he's been to us." But, as the speaker came hurrying up the slope, the purple emperor's proud captor, stooping over the prisoner, sprang to his feet with a stifled scream, fled backward toward his friend, white-faced and afraid.

"There's a man — there's a man — there's a man lying up there, dead!" he exclaimed, hysterically. "Oh, what shall we do? My net's lying over his head — and I had almost touched him, before I saw what it was."

He shuddered convulsively. The other had halted beside him, aghast. Together, they stared apprehensively up at the fringe of bush above, from which protruded the pole of the butterfly-net. Had either shown any further disposition to flee the spot, they would both undoubtedly have run for it. But both stood their ground, in spite of the dread with which the untoward discovery could not but inspire them.

"We — we must make sure," one suggested, and the other, setting his teeth, took a tentative step forward.

As soon as they could muster up courage sufficient, they scanned fearfully the prone body, lying

face downward among the dead leaves. The fate that had befallen it was sufficiently plain, for in the back of its gray tweed coat was a ragged hole, about which had spread a great stain, still wet. They gazed at it, horror-stricken, with wide eyes.

"He — he's not dead," said one of them, suddenly. "See — he's breathing. We must do something. Help — help me to turn him over."

The other shuddered again; he seemed even more overcome than his friend by the gruesome incident. None the less, he obeyed bravely. Together, they raised the limp figure, and turned it over on its back. It was that of a young man, tall, well featured, fashionably dressed. Amid the black hair brushed back from his forehead was a curiously conspicuous white lock, at sight of which their eyes met again in a glance of alarmed, but only partial, enlightenment.

"It — it's *Mr. Baxendale!*" whispered one of them.

"What are we to do?" cried the other, wringing his hands. "He may be dead before we can get help here."

"We must get him to the canoe, and take him across to the cottage — that's the only way. We can't leave him lying here while —" He jumped back as if he had been shot, for the wounded man had slowly opened his eyes, yawned cavernously, was gazing blankly about him.

"What the deuce — !" he began as the boy facing him suddenly took cover behind a bush,

blushing hotly, with downcast glance. And, "I beg your pardon," he mumbled, brows bent, his tone changed to one in which doubt and certainty struggled together as he raised himself on one elbow to scan that youth's features more closely, with amazed, incredulous eyes. "I beg your pardon, but — how — where am I? Who are you?"

"I — I — oh, it doesn't matter just now," a tremulous voice answered him, and he lay limply back again, the better to turn over in his mind the astounding discovery he had made. The boy had quite disappeared from his view.

Across the hollow behind, the other had fled, and presently returned at no less speed, but in new guise. For it was an obvious girl who brought the bewildered prince a baling-dish full of cold, clear water, in which, after a swift, glad glance at her, he obligingly buried his tell-tale face, while she surreptitiously tossed to the third of the trio, still ensconced shoulder-high in the sheltering growth, a bundle by means of which that shy youth affected a similar metamorphosis; and then the Princess of Marque emerged in the usual garb of her sex, from behind the bush where the boy had disappeared.

"We thought you were dead," her friend was meantime remarking anxiously to the wounded man. "Are you badly hurt, Mr. Baxendale? How — how has this happened?"

"I don't think I'm quite dead," the prince had to admit, evading the second part of her inquiry. He had already regained some grasp of the situation,

and contrived a plan to shape it to his own ends. "I don't think I'm quite dead. In fact, I feel sure that I'll last for a year or two yet, with a little care and attention. Can you tell me how far it is to the nearest house? I don't know this part of the world at all, and I can assure you that it's a no less pleasure than unexpected surprise to see her highness and you here, Miss Rosewarne."

The princess came forward, avoiding his eye.

"Noreen," she said, somewhat nervously, "shouldn't we get Mr. Baxendale to the canoe now, and take him across to the cottage?"

"Your highness is very good," murmured the invalid, "but I can't intrude again on your privacy. In a few minutes, I shall be able, I hope, to make my way to some other place."

"You must leave yourself in our hands, for the present, at least," she told him, with something of her old imperious manner. "There is no other accommodation nearer than the boarding-house at Bitter Creek, and that must be some miles from here. Do you think you can walk as far as the edge of the lake, Mr. Baxendale, if we help you?"

"I feel pretty nearly all right, now," he answered, bravely; "but will you give me just five minutes yet? Then, I'll try. I'm more than sorry to put you to so much trouble, and to have alarmed you so needlessly, so terribly."

"But what has happened?" the princess asked. "How do you come to be here and in this condition?"

The prince closed his eyes, and sighed, quite effectively.

"I've been very foolish," he admitted, as if deprecating all censure. "I got myself into a fix. I had to fight a duel, with a man who said I'd insulted him. The police in New York got to hear of it in advance — and I was arrested last night as I was leaving the city. Of course, under these circumstances, I simply had to escape, and we came down here to be safe from further interference. The other man is evidently a better shot than I, and I had no second. But it wasn't kind of him to go off and leave me lying the way he did."

"He must be a brute!" Noreen Rosewarne agreed, her eyes flashing. "I hope the police will get hold of him!"

"But that would never do," the prince assured her, in a weak, but urgent, voice, "because then they'd probably get me, too; and I'd hate to be locked up during this fine weather."

"Does no one at all know where you are?" asked the princess, biting her lip, evidently absorbed in some mental problem, and, as the prince shook his head, she looked doubtfully across at her friend. For it was evident that the matter of affording the young man shelter as had been suggested was not going to be by any means as simple as it had at first sight appeared. It was one thing to succor the wounded, but quite another to harbor a fugitive from the law of the land.

But, in Noreen Rosewarne's steady eyes, there was no sign that she had thought better of her first intention, and she settled the difficulty at once.

"As soon as you're ready, we'll help you to the canoe, Mr. Baxendale," she said to the prince, and he, thus opportunely reminded of the plight he was in, made an apparent effort to raise himself, and no less apparently failed. In an instant, Noreen Rosewarne was kneeling beside him, her pretty forehead puckered with anxious sympathy, an arm about his shoulders. The princess promptly came to her aid, and together they raised him to a sitting posture. He gazed a little, his eyes half-closed.

Very carefully and with infinite tenderness, they got him to his feet, and he stood there for a moment, swaying between them.

"Put your arms round our necks," said the princess coolly, "and we'll walk you down the slope. It's only a couple of hundred yards to the canoe. If you can't walk so far, we'll carry you."

The prince almost blushed for himself, as he took a shambling step forward, the two girls supporting him, each with an arm round his waist.

"You must lean on us," commanded Noreen Rosewarne.

"You're very good," he returned, in a shaky whisper, as he obeyed.

They got him easily down the slope and by slow degrees up the other side, picked their way carefully for his sake through the tangle of brush be-

yond, and, after a journey he at least found far too short, emerged on the beach beside the birch-bark canoe.

They set him down on the sands while they launched their light craft, wading out with it till it was well afloat. Then, the problem was how to get him on board dry-shod, but he solved that for them by rising to his feet and, staggering forward, was over his ankles in water before they could reach him; so that they soon had him comfortably settled in the canoe. Then, clambering lightly on board themselves, they took to their paddles.

These they handled like experts. The prince, lying languidly where they had disposed him, could not keep his eyes off the graceful figure in front of him, and the picture Noreen Rosewarne made as she swung to and fro, intent only on her task, was surely excuse sufficient for his absorption.

All the way they kept up a racing pace, breathing evenly, undistressed, holding a straight course from point to point, past promontory and bay and bluff, turning inshore at last toward a most picturesque little harbor, encircled, save for its narrow entrance, by a steep, unusual formation of rock, tree-clad, with a wide, low, white-walled dwelling apparent under the pines above. A rough flight of steps hewn out of the living rock led deviously to this from the dock at the water's edge. Noreen Rosewarne sprang ashore.

"I'll run up and get help," she said, while she was making the painter fast.

"No, let me," begged the princess, and, before the other could object, had made off.

Noreen Rosewarne rose and turned to the prince.

"You'd better just wait where you are, and we'll get you carried up," she observed, but he was already on his knees, scrambling, somewhat uncertainly, to the dock, and she could not but lend him again the aid of her strong young arms.

"I'm not really so far through as you might imagine," he had the grace to admit, and then hedged a little in case she should take him too literally. "If I could just get lying down for a few hours somewhere out of the sun — and a little food, perhaps — I think I would probably be fit to take myself off your hands. I don't know, I'm sure, what might have happened to me, if you hadn't come to my rescue. I'm beginning to look upon you as my good angel, Miss Rosewarne."

"But — won't the police interfere with you?" she asked uncertainly, coloring.

"I'm rather afraid they will," he replied. "But that's no reason why I should impose on your kindness a moment longer than is absolutely necessary. I'm really ashamed to have intruded on your seclusion at all, but I thought these wilds were quite uninhabited."

"Oh, you mustn't feel that way," she declared. "It would have been dreadful, if we hadn't found

you. You might have lain there for days — for weeks perhaps, it's always so lonely. And you mustn't think of going, till you're quite able and — it's quite safe."

In the distance, at the top of the steps, the princess had reappeared with a couple of other young women, in caps and aprons, who were carrying what looked like a stretcher. The prince regarded them in some dismay. He had expected to see menservants, and could not now contemplate being carried up that steep incline.

"If you'll give me your arm," he said to Noreen Rosewarne, "I feel quite sure I could walk. I don't think it would be safe to carry anyone round these corners." With that excuse, leaning very lightly on her, but with one of her hands firmly clasped in his, he had already progressed some little way up the steps before the others could reach him.

"I'm getting on famously," he assured the princess, with a wan smile, and she bade the maids turn back, since it would not have been possible there to make any use of the cot-frame they had brought for his transport.

Breathing heavily, he at length reached the terrace at the top of the steps, and then, in spite of his protests, they made him lie down on their makeshift stretcher, picked it up, and carried him off easily toward the broad, creeper-clad piazza of the capacious white cottage, overlooking the lake.

At its entrance, they were confronted by a very

pleasant and young-looking matron, who held up her hands at sight of the prince in such circumstance, and led the way without any words, through a spacious lounge-hall in which a log-fire was burning, to an equally spacious bedroom at the end of a broad corridor.

"We must send for a doctor at once," she exclaimed in quick French to the princess, as they lifted him to the bed there, and she saw the state he was in. Thereat, the princess looked interrogatively at him.

But he shook his head with all the emphasis he could command.

"Please, do not," he begged, in his most plaintive tones. "I'm in no danger, and it would be most unpleasant for all of us, if anyone were to find out that I'm here. I know exactly what's wrong, and I can doctor myself quite effectually. It won't take me long to put everything right."

The maids had withdrawn, at a sign from Noreen Rosewarne. The other two were regarding each other with gravely doubtful eyes. The prince had remembered by then who the elder of them must be, for Baxendale had related to him all that had happened at Marque.

"You'll let me have my own way in that, won't you, countess?" he urged, as she bent on him a searching glance, yet one that did not lack kindliness. "You haven't heard yet that — I'm a fugitive from the police. And I've been fighting a duel.

That's how I got into this mess. It wouldn't do at all, you see, to let any doctor into these secrets. And I can doctor myself quite effectually.

"There should be a suit-case of mine at the station," he went on with more confidence, as she seemed to waver. "If I might give you the further trouble of sending for that, I'll undertake to be safely out of here within a few hours. It was checked through to 'Mr. Brown,' by the way, as a precaution against accident."

Noreen Rosewarne left the room, and the princess almost immediately followed her. The Countess Considine, bereft of their support, could not but capitulate.

"It shall be as you wish, M. Baxendale," she said, with a dubious shake of the head, "although —"

"Thank you, countess," he returned, gratefully. "You needn't be in the least anxious about me, now. As soon as I've got into a change of clothes, I'll— "

"But you must remain in bed," she protested, horrified by his haste. "You are weak and wounded. You must remain here until you are well again. Listen, then, Monsieur Baxendale. There is room and to spare here for all, and I know that Mademoiselle Rosewarne would never forgive me, if I allowed you to leave her roof while you are still in such a state.

"So, that, if you please, is settled. And, now, you must have some nourishment. I shall send you

also such other comforts as we can contrive. But you must remain in bed! And that is agreed, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"You, also, are far more kind to me than I deserve, countess," he murmured, closing his eyes. And, when he opened them again, he was alone.

He had more than enough to occupy his mind profitably, while he lay there in the lap of luxury, waiting till his most providential suit-case should turn up, gazing about the big, daintily furnished bedroom, or at the enchanting outlook over the lake, visible from the bed through a broad, white-draped bow window. He was more than a little hungry, but there was no doubt a plentiful meal in prospect, and he would attend to that when it appeared. At present, he was entirely taken up with speculations as to the ultimate outcome of all these masterly maneuvers on his part, with worshipful thoughts of the dark-eyed damsel, for whose sweet sake he had dared so much, with wonder at his most startling discovery of Her Highness of Marque there, the last place in the whole wide world where he would have looked for her.

"That Carteret girl must surely have known that the princess was here," he said to himself, "and also that Bolter Baxendale had met her in Marque. If she had only mentioned it at the time, I'd have been better prepared — I nearly gave myself away when I realized who it really was whom I was staring at among the bushes. But I think

I've made good all right, so far — and with the countess as well. Lucky I remembered her name, eh?"

He looked ecstatically about him again.

"I'm in luck all round just now," he told himself, with a joyful smile. "I've landed plump in Paradise. I only wish I didn't feel quite so like the old serpent, myself."

The smile faded from his face. "And I most sincerely trust," he said, in a serious whisper, "that Ingrid of Marque won't turn out to be the angel with the flaming sword!"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE SERPENT IN PARADISE

FOR a while, the prince lay staring contemplatively up at the oaken rafters of the low roof above him. He smiled contentedly again from time to time, till a knock at the door recalled him to consciousness of his immediate situation, caused him to adopt hastily an expression more in keeping. In response to his faint, "Come in," the Countess Considine entered, followed once more by the maids, laden with all the luxuries and necessities for that meal of which he stood so much in need. One of them brought forward a light table, and, when the countess had seen everything set thereon to her satisfaction, she looked down at him again somewhat dubiously.

"You must be starved, M. Baxendale," she remarked, in a tone of pity, "and, I wonder, can you help yourself?"

He nodded very gratefully, as the maids, having raised him a little, set cushions under his shoulders.

"You're really too kind," he assured the countess. "I shall manage admirably, and, after I've had some food, I'll be perfectly all right."

"Your suit-case will be here by that time, and,

then, you'll be able to get properly into bed. But I do wish you'd let me send for the physician, just to satisfy us that your wound isn't more dangerous than you think." She had evidently been talking that over with the two girls, and was still concerned about it.

"There's no fear of that," he asserted so positively that she looked a little relieved, "and, if you'll give me an hour's grace, I think I can convince you that there's nothing any doctor could do for me. I probably look much worse than I am, and I've no intention of staying in bed. Once my kit arrives, I need only impose on your hospitality for another hour."

The countess held up her hands again in evident consternation. "*Mais, mon dieu!*" she cried. "But is not that already arranged otherwise? Her highness and Miss Rosewarne would never forgive me, if I took them such another message from you. They have bidden me beg that you will be their guest for as long as it may suit you. And you must promise me, M. Baxendale, that you will not leave your room, till you are quite well again. You are in danger elsewhere, while here you are safe at least from the police."

"You are all more than kind," returned the prince warmly, "but —"

"Listen, then, Monsieur Baxendale," the countess interrupted, repeating herself for the sake of additional argument. "There is room and to spare for us all here at Nahuel Huapi. The cottage is

very large — too large, perhaps, for three women alone. Of servants, there are only the maids, and no one else comes nearer than the gate-lodge. Where else will you be more free — or more welcome?"

The prince, trifling hungrily with his knife and fork, could not controvert what she had said, and, at last, gave way gracefully to her arguments, as he had from the first intended to do.

"If I won't be in the way," he said, "nothing could suit me better than to remain for a day or two, till I'm fit to face the troubles I'll find waiting me whenever I show my face outside. Will you please assure her highness and Miss Rosewarne that I'm deeply grateful to them and to yourself for all your goodness, and — "

"And you will do as I say," the countess stipulated. "They will both be so glad to know that you intend to take care of yourself as you ought, even though you won't let us send for the physician."

"I'll do everything else," the prince promised, and she at last left him, sufficiently well pleased with the success of her mission, while he fell to, half-famished, on the feast she had provided, and made, for an invalid, a surprisingly hearty meal. This did him so much good that, after he had finished, he took to whistling under his breath, and wishing he had a cigar.

Another knock preluded the appearance of his suit-case, and, as soon as the maid who brought it in had departed again, he locked the door behind

her, and proceeded at his leisure to make himself more presentable. He had already discovered that he had a commodious bathroom also at his disposal.

He smiled to himself as he pulled off his coat, and examined it with great interest. A cut in the breast and a ragged hole in its back, both surrounded by a broad patch of discoloration, still damp and all stuck about with sand, had proved even more effective than he had anticipated, and not only with his enemies. From the lining behind each of those, he pulled one of the two little india rubber bladders that he had bought on Sixth Avenue in New York, on his way to the Waldorf, both burst and empty, from which still came a faint odor as of some cheap, sticky brand of red wine. These he consigned carefully to the fire of faggots burning bright on the hearth. His waistcoat, shirt and undershirt also were all properly punctured and stained, and it was of course on his white shirt that the port had made its most effective show.

"But, if I hadn't been precious quick in dropping, I'd have been a corpse in earnest," he said to himself, with a reminiscent frown. "That other fellow's bullet passed just above my head as I heeled over. It would have got me if I had been standing still; and, then, I'd have had no use at all for these theatrical properties. But never mind what might have happened. It's what has happened that counts, and here I am, safe and sound! That's good enough to go on with. Now, if I can only — and, lord! what a dear little witch she is! I

wouldn't have believed I could ever be so bothered about any girl!"

Step by step, and cigar in mouth except while he was in his bath, with no sign of any wound at all about his broad chest or shoulders, he made by degrees a great change for the better in his appearance. A careful application of Ernst's two most useful dyes restored his hair to its pristine blackness, and made his counterfeit white lock no less conspicuous.

"And, to be quite honest, I am a double-dyed villain," he muttered, as if in answer to some sudden twinge of conscience as he put the bottles carefully back in the suit-case, beside his cigar-box. I don't believe Noreen would ever forgive me if she knew what a scandalous trick I'm playing. But all's fair in love and war." He was still debating that risk when he at length got into bed again to rest for an hour or two, but it did not interfere with his falling asleep almost at once, very tired after the preceding night of unrest.

It was almost dark when the prince woke, hearing someone knock. A maid came in with candles, drew the curtains, and replenished the fire, while he yawned and stretched himself, infinitely refreshed by his belated siesta.

"What time is dinner?" he asked her; and, when she told him: "I wish you'd take the Countess Considine my compliments," he said, with a smile that did his cause no harm with her, "and say that I'm going to get up."

A few minutes later, she came back to his door with a message to the effect that, if he thought it wise to leave his room, he was to dine with the three ladies.

He congratulated himself that he had had the forethought to provide himself with clothes for such an occasion, and, having laid these out, proceeded to lock away the damaged suit he had been wearing. As he was doing so, it occurred to him that the maids would not like him any the worse for a delicately bestowed *douceur* and he thrust a hand into the pocket in which he had kept Baxendale's note-case. It was not there, and, search where he would, he could come across no trace of it. He sat back on his heels, and whistled, not a little dismayed by this loss, which left him absolutely penniless.

"Nebo, the Nailer, no doubt!" he commented, with a wrathful frown. "I ought to have had sense enough to tuck it away in some safer place. But he's nailed it, all right; and worrying won't bring it back. I'll manage, somehow." With this philosophical reflection, he finally stowed away his discarded garments, locked the suit-case, and so dismissed the matter from his mind for the moment.

When he at length made his way, with feeble footsteps and one arm in a sling for the sake of the moral effect on his hostess, along the corridor to the lounge, he found it empty, and settled himself comfortably in a big arm-chair before the blazing log-fire. The lamplight and the cozy atmosphere of the place affected him pleasantly. The silence was

presently broken by a chord or two of soft music from a room near, and someone began to sing. It was the princess. She was singing a gay sea-song of Marque, in the *patois* her fisher-folk use. He leaned forward, chin on palm and elbows on knees, staring into the fire, listening. And, thus, Noreen Rosewarne discovered him as she came in from between the curtains of another corridor.

He heard her light footsteps, and would have risen; but she signed to him to sit still; and soon the song ceased. The princess sauntered through from the drawing-room, and joined them at the fire.

"Are you not rather rash, Mr. Baxendale?" she asked solicitously, indicating his apparently injured arm, regarding with grave sympathy his features, whose pallor was really due to a dash of violet-powder he had carefully applied to them after a further struggle with his inconvenient conscience.

"A mere sprain," he assured her as to his arm. "I'm really all right, and by to-morrow I'll be — er —" He changed the subject hastily, aware that he had all but overshot his mark in that last sentence. "What's really staggered me most," he said, and took credit to himself for telling the whole truth in this instance, "has been meeting your highness again so unexpectedly — and here! I'm beginning to look upon Miss Rosewarne as my good angel, and on myself as a confirmed trespasser! This is the second time she's come to my rescue in a predicament that might have turned out badly for me."

The princess sank down on the great bear-skin

rug, tucking one slim, silk-clad ankle under her, clasped her white, ringless hands round the other, and looked smilingly up at him. Noreen Rosewarne, behind her, was leaning against the mantel, and the prince wished for a moment that he had Baxendale's skill with the brush, that he might have made permanent the picture they thus presented.

"You might have fared far worse on this occasion, but for Noreen, than you would have in Marque," observed the princess. "A pistol is much more dangerous than a palette. I had no idea that artists as a class were so bloodthirsty. Was it a picture you fought about, Mr. Baxendale?"

"It wasn't exactly an artist my quarrel was with," the prince explained, as if in defense of that law-abiding sect. "It was really a professional fire-eater," he went on, impelled by a rash inclination to trench on that most risky ground, "a soldier, and a compatriot of your highness's, who challenged me."

He saw that he had succeeded in startling her.

"Not from Marque?" she asked, no longer smiling, and yet did not look at all relieved when he shook his head.

"A gentleman in the suite of His Highness of Jetland," he told her; and she glanced, in evident dismay, up at Noreen Rosewarne, standing quietly behind her.

"Is — is Prince Juric in this country?" she presently inquired, leaning back against the other girl's skirt, to shelter her face from the fire.

"I saw him in New York yesterday," he returned,

and hoped inwardly that he had not been too communicative for his own welfare.

"That's surely strange," the princess remarked. "I was in New York yesterday myself. When did he arrive?"

"On Tuesday, I think. But he came over incognito, and it isn't generally known that he's on this side. Perhaps, I shouldn't have mentioned it, even to your royal highness; but I know the news will go no further now."

"You know the prince pretty well, don't you, Mr. Baxendale?" Noreen Rosewarne put in; and he nodded as his eyes met her clear glance.

"Quite well," he answered. "I've spent some time in Jetland with him, and we're really very good friends." He laughed a little, reminiscently. "In fact, he would have been quite annoyed," said he, "to hear that one of his own suite had made an end of me." She shivered a little, recalling what he had looked like when they had found him among the bushes, and he, seeing this, became instantly serious. "But all's well that ends well," he concluded, "and here I am, none — not much the worse of my experience, except for the feeling that I have had to impose on your kindness again." He looked very gratefully over at her, and she smiled back as she shook her head.

"What steamer did you cross by, princess?" he asked her companion, anxious to find out all he might while he had that chance. He could not conceive how Her Highness of Marque came to be in

this part of the world at all, since he knew from sad experience that his majesty, to whom she and he owed allegiance, was always most unwilling to grant leave of absence from Europe to any of his subordinate rulers. He wanted to know what her plans might be, that he might order his own in a contrary direction. He thought she had seemed none too well pleased with the news he had just given her, and wondered whether the emperor had been worrying her as well as him about that project, of which, he had by now firmly made up his mind, nothing could ever come. And he hoped against hope that that interfering old man, his most august uncle, had not contrived any further embarrassment for her in support of his cherished scheme.

"I came through from San Francisco by train," the princess informed him, more composedly. "I've been almost round the world since we met last, Mr. Baxendale."

—"What a splendid trip! I must try to make it myself, one of these days. And will you be long in America? There's so much more you should see, now you're here, and I hope —"

"I must content myself with this little corner of it, on the present occasion at any rate," she said, simply. "I expect to spend a week here with Noreen, and, then, my holiday is almost at an end. Next Saturday, I must go on again."

"Drat it!" said the prince to himself. "That's the day I, also, must start for home. I'll have to see that we don't choose the same steamer to travel

by. But much may happen within a week; and who knows whether I'll ever go back to my chains?" He glanced at Noreen Rosewarne again, and Noreen Rosewarne flushed a little, perhaps at something she saw in his speculative eyes, while he was remarking aloud to the princess: "But you'll surely spend a day or two in New York? And, if your highness would permit, I should esteem it a privilege to show you some of the sights there."

"But won't the police be looking for you?" asked the princess, with a swift smile over his self-sacrificing forgetfulness. "In any case, I don't intend to spend any more time there. I'm a country mouse at heart, you see, and I've had more than enough of towns in the course of my travels. I'm too well content in these friendly solitudes to exchange them willingly for the turmoil of a city. I saw enough of New York on my way through."

"Good, fair cousin," the prince remarked approvingly, in his mind. "Our arrangements are not apparently going to clash after all. And I don't believe the emperor has been pestering you about his preposterous plan. It would have been confoundedly awkward for poor old Bolter, you know, if you had taken it into your pretty head to pay him a visit of ceremony — as you ought of course to do, since he's, for the time being, your senior in precedence. But blow all such nonsensical etiquette. Let's both be happy in our own natural way for once in our wretchedly unnatural lives!" In pursuit of this laudable ambition, he changed the conversa-

tion again, and gave the two girls a graphic and most amusing account of his escape from the plain-clothes policeman the day before. When the Countess Considine at length put in an appearance, even the invalid himself was laughing whole-heartedly. But he recollected himself at sight of her, and looked as woebegone as he conveniently could while the princess was telling her that Juric of Jetland was in New York.

The countess, also, received that news with some appearance of concern, but the reverberations of a great gong prevented her expressing any opinion upon it. The prince made a very able pretense of being unable to rise from his chair, and Noreen Rosewarne had to come to his aid before he finally got to his feet. Even then, he continued to cling to her arm, with a word or two of plaintive apology, and thus they followed the princess through to the dining-room, the Countess Considine bringing up the rear, with a shrewd smile for the well-matched couple before her.

"What sort of person is your friend, His Highness of Jetland, Monsieur Baxendale?" she asked in her habitual French, as they seated themselves at the table. "One has heard so many strange stories —"

"But you musn't take for granted the truth of every story you hear," objected the prince, calmly occupied with a pepper-pot. "His highness is really a very good sort: a little rackety and erratic at times, perhaps, but quite sound at the core. I think he might best be described as more of a human being

than a mere prince; and, if he sometimes pulls a little on the leading-strings, I, for one, don't blame him. I can't stand leading-strings myself."

"What a delightfully independent life you artists must lead!" said the princess, with a little sigh for her own subject condition.

But Noreen Rosewarne kept the conversation in its first channel.

"What's the prince like, Mr. Baxendale?" she asked, with a great show of interest, and the prince knitted his brows as he swallowed a spoonful of soup. He was glad that the table was lighted only by candles, the crimson shades of which might be held responsible for any added color in his pale face.

"Oh, a big, fair, ordinary-looking sort of fellow," he answered, a little lamely. "You'll see lots like him among the purple emperor's Dragoon Guards."

"I suppose a soldier's life would not suit you?" the princess remarked, looking mirthfully round at him.

"I tried it for a time," he told her, "and I liked it very well indeed, in some ways. But there's always too little active service, and too much routine. It's a mechanical existence in times of peace."

"Oh, you Americans!" cried the countess. "Are you all like your Monsieur Roosevelt? What a breathless place this poor world would be, if —"

"What a pity His Highness of Jetland was not born an American!" suggested Noreen Rosewarne, and the prince nodded emphatic approval of that remark.

"I'm quite sure he would agree with you there, Miss Rosewarne," he asserted. "As a free man, even on a desert island, he'd be far better pleased with his lot than he is to-day."

"But don't you think he'd soon find such absolute solitude a price too high to pay for mere liberty from leading-strings?" she demurred to his rather extravagant statement, and the princess smiled again.

"He wouldn't waste any time there, if I know anything of him," returned the prince, with profound conviction. He'd be off to sea on a raft, as soon as he could contrive one, in search of some more congenial company."

"And what if he could find none but some fair Nereid?" questioned the princess, provocatively. "Isn't he something of a woman-hater, this friend of yours?"

"Very far from it," the prince averred, and so positively that the Countess Considine and Noreen Rosewarne were moved to such laughter as somewhat disconcerted him, till he recollected that he was still in Bolter Baxendale's place.

"But your highness surely knows the Prince of Jetland far better than I?" he appealed to the princess, and she regarded him with a whimsical gravity for a moment before she answered.

"I don't know why you should think so. I've never to my knowledge seen or spoken to his highness — before this afternoon."

Had a bomb-shell suddenly burst on the prince's plate, he could scarcely have been more startled and

astounded than he was at that moment. He saw that the secret he had thought so safe was known to them all. He saw no less clearly the very invidious position this left him in. He almost choked in his efforts to find some excuse for himself. His confusion and stress of mind were so evident that Noreen Rosewarne was at length impelled to come to his rescue again.

"Your highness is none the less welcome here," she said softly, and the vanquished prince bowed very gratefully to her.

"And you mustn't bear me any malice, cousin," the princess declared, "since it was really Noreen who first suggested that you were not Mr. Baxendale, and you yourself finally gave us the key to the mystery."

The prince looked lamentably about him, and then:

"'*Qui s' excuse s' accuse,*'" said he. "So, I'll sink all apology, and simply implore your pardon for a trick that would, but for a few extenuating circumstances, be quite unpardonable." And he launched into an account of the loneliness that had at last driven him to play the truant from Jetland, of the more amusing side of that escapade, and of his final and forcible assumption of Baxendale's personality, which he described as his sole chance of escape, for the few remaining days of his stolen holiday, from the suite the emperor had dispatched to shepherd him home. He soon led them from grave to gay, had them laughing again, was laughing himself, as he related how Baxendale had received the suite in

his place. His account of Professor Jocrisse and that learned gentleman's duties toward him brought tears of mirth to the Countess Considine's eyes. The dinner ended even more happily than it had begun, and, when, after the brief evening that ensued was over, he went off to his room again, he could not but feel that he had come very well out of an ordeal that had at first threatened to cover him with the direst confusion.

"But I've got a more difficult hand than ever to play here now," he told himself, and sauntered somewhat disconsolately across to the window.

He pulled the curtains apart, and stood there for a long time, gazing out across the still waters of the lake, over which the moon had laid a wide silver pathway. And, at last, out of his tentative speculations came concrete resolve. He had pondered every risk, was prepared to face each and all, steadfastly and unflinchingly.

"She's worth the best of them and a lot besides," he assured himself, "and, if she'll only have me, I'll marry her out of hand!" But it was not the Princess of Marque of whom he was thinking.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WHAT THE MOON SAW

SUNDAY morning broke clear and cloudless again over Lake Nahuel Huapi, and one at least of the inmates of the white cottage that overlooks it saw the sun rise. The prince was early astir, and, gazing out of the open casement through which had come all night to soothe his slumbers the balmy breath of the pines and the keen, invigorating scent of the sea, he felt strongly tempted to sally forth for a plunge into its placid waters. His short night's rest had revived him immeasurably, and the hint of frost in the air was stirring all the blood in his veins.

"But it wouldn't do," he concluded regretfully. "I must bear in mind that I'm a bit of an invalid. I must be very circumspect in every way, or I'll end up by making a mess of things, as I very nearly succeeded in doing last night — silly ass that I was to start fishing in such deep waters! I'd better just stay in bed till I'm called."

His resolution of over-night was no less firm in the morning. What he had finally made up his mind under the full moon to adventure, he was no less determined, in the light of day and under the less

illusive sunshine, to carry out, regardless of all those risks he could perhaps foresee more clearly now.

"It will make my old uncle hopping mad of course, but I can't help that," he cogitated, between the blankets again, and staring reflectively out at a belt of firs on the other side of the lake. "He may drum-major that unfortunate fellow Ughtred of Utgard into a marriage of policy, but — thank heaven! — I'm not the prince imperial; it doesn't matter so much whom *I* marry, and I'll marry whom I please, or no one at all. That's all there is to it. Of course, I'll have to break some eggs to make my omelette, but it's the omelette I'm aching for, not the eggs. They'd soon get addled in any case. What good are rank and titles and estates to a man, if he's going to be miserable among them? Give me liberty and the girl I want, and anyone's welcome to my old job. I wish to goodness that Bolter Baxendale would take it on permanently!"

Filled with such republican sentiments, he lay patiently revolving in his mind one plan after another for winning Noreen Rosewarne, till it was time for early tea and a bath.

Inquiry was made at his door as to whether he would not prefer to breakfast in bed, and to this he replied, with emphasis, in the negative. And time passed, as though the old gentleman with the scythe and the hour-glass were suffering from severe fatigue, till at length the gong boomed forth its welcome invitation to the prince to leave his room. He

slipped his arm into its black silk sling, and sauntered down the corridor into the lounge.

The Countess Considine received him there alone, but presently Noreen Rosewarne appeared, shy-eyed for once, and smiling. She made him a pretty curtsey, as he would have held out his free hand.

"I hope your highness has slept well, and is much better this morning," she said, demurely. "The princess is going to rest till later in the forenoon, and sends you the same good wishes. So, shall we go in to breakfast?" And, throughout the meal, all morning in fact, she maintained toward him the same diffident, somewhat aloof demeanor. It fell chiefly to the countess to keep the conversation going at table, since the prince, puzzled to account for the change, was also a little distrait, and on her devolved the duty of entertaining their guest at intervals throughout a long forenoon, while the two girls kept each other company in the princess's apartment.

Under such circumstances, the prince mooned aimlessly about the terrace in front of the cottage, with a cigar or in the lounge with a book, bemoaning his bad luck at first, but comforting himself on reflection with the thought that he had still three full days of grace in his favor. So, the sleepy Sunday forenoon passed somehow, before he had quite worn out the watch he was constantly producing with such an impatient jerk. The princess at last made her appearance, a little before the

luncheon-hour, and with that the four of them seemed to fall naturally again into their former more friendly relations to one another. Noreen Rosewarne appeared to have recovered her usual sunny spirits.

Luncheon proved a very much pleasanter meal, from the prince's point of view at least, than breakfast had been. After the servants had been dismissed, they lingered at table for a long time, laughing again and no less light-heartedly over one reminiscence or another of the night before. The prince understood that all there was to forgive him had been forgiven, but that the others were not disposed to forget the more humorous side of his situation, and he did not in the least resent their laughing at him as well as with him. They had outwitted him fairly, even if through his own crass self-confidence. But it would be his turn next.

He wandered out on to the terrace with them, in high good humor, and looked down at the still blue waters of the wide lake with contented eyes. Noreen Rosewarne had struck a match for him, and, while she held it at the tip of his cigar, he had glanced into her eyes.

The Countess Considine left them there.

"If your highness had really been Monsieur Baxendale, you would know my lazy habit," she remarked to the prince for his enlightenment, as she disappeared. And he smiled in very friendly fashion after the good-natured little lady, whom he would not for the world have deprived of her

forty winks on that occasion. He only wished that the princess would feel impelled to follow the other's good example. But her highness made no such move.

Afternoon tea was served on the terrace in the pleasant sunshine, and not till it was over did anyone seem to notice the flight of time. But Noreen Rosewarne at length glanced at the miniature watch on one of her bracelets.

"What an idle day we have spent!" she exclaimed. "Won't you come and paddle about the lake for a little with me, princess? I'm going to fetch those butterfly-nets we left behind yesterday."

"I wish you would take me with you as an extra hand, though I'm not much use with only one?" begged the prince, eagerly. "I want to look for something I've lost," he added on a brilliant inspiration, bethinking himself opportunely of Baxendale's missing note-case, "perhaps among the bushes where you found me."

"I have letters to read and to write," said the princess, rising with a very disconsolate look, "but you two will be crew sufficient for the canoe. So, I'll bid you *au revoir* for the present, and —"

"And forget all about us — especially while you have a pen in your hand," suggested the prince, apprehensive, perhaps, of woman's talent for correspondence. And she smiled back at him, reassuringly.

Noreen Rosewarne had looked a little startled at first over this summary disposal of her suggestion,

but she could not help herself now, and led the way with a very good grace down the steps to the dock below. The prince, as he settled himself in the bottom of the canoe, while she heaped cushions behind his shoulders, once more felt some of those pangs of conscience, which, it is to be hoped, harass an impostor, but he could at least console himself with the knowledge that his left wrist was really somewhat inflamed and sore, for his pigeon-toed enemy, Captain Castrique, had trodden on it as it trailed through the sand while carrying him up out of the hollow.

"And, anyhow, I'll have it at work again by to-morrow," he promised himself, as Noreen, having settled her skirts to her satisfaction, pushed off, and got way on at once with a strong, clean stroke of her paddle.

"Comfortable?" she asked; and he nodded very contentedly.

"I've never been more comfortable — or better content," he told her boldly. He had never, as you have already heard, been one who hesitated on the brink of enterprise or opportunity. And, in this instance, there was the thought of the long forenoon he had practically lost, to spur him on. He had only till midnight on Wednesday to —

"How did you like Vienna, Miss Rosewarne," he asked inconsequently, and, as she looked up at him in some surprise: "I saw you there one day — in the Prater," he said. "But I couldn't catch your eye."

She laughed.

"What difference would it have made if you

had?" she asked, lightly. "I had never seen you before in my life, and you didn't know then who I was, did you?"

"I did," he had to confess, and felt impelled to further confidences. "Indeed, I seemed to have known you for quite a long time — from the picture the princess gave my good friend Baxendale. He was in Jetland again, after he had been in Marque, and I saw it then."

"He should have shown you his own picture of the princess instead," she commented, gravely; "but, of course, he left that with her."

He had all but admitted that he had seen this portrait, also, but, gathering now that what he had seen was simply a copy of the original canvas, felt glad that he had not done so. His faculty for making such gratuitous statements had got him into trouble sufficient already.

"It was really a picture worth seeing," she went on, since he seemed to have nothing to say. "I think he almost did her justice in it — and she has such perfect features! I'd love to be tall and fair and stately, like her."

"'Oh, would some power the giftie gie us
'To see ourselves as others see us,'"

quoted the prince, perverting the poet's purpose to his own ends, as he looked into her eyes again for a moment before their dark lashes hid from him their unplumbed depths. But she was smiling in spite of herself at the warmth of his tone, and the implied compliment. And he smiled too, very

happily. That short voyage came to an end far too soon for him.

They landed together at the spot where the two boys had sprung ashore on the previous forenoon, and Noreen Rosewarne, remembering the unconventional costume in which the princess and she had first appeared to her present companion, glanced shyly at him as he tramped along at her side. The sand-hills were heavy going.

"Were you really unconscious when we discovered you?" she asked, innocently.

"I was," he said: "sound asleep, worn out. And, curiously enough, I was dreaming — of you! Do you believe in telepathy, Miss Rosewarne?"

"It was the princess, not I, who first caught sight of you," she informed him, tantalizingly. "So, in that case, it doesn't seem to have been of much service, does it? — unless, of course, it affected the brain of the butterfly that led her to you!"

He laughed, baffled again by her apparent determination to allow him no opening for the more personal application of his insidious remarks; and forthwith he determined that he must force the pace.

"Do you know that my uncle, the emperor, desires, for reasons of policy, to arrange a marriage of convenience between my cousin of Marque and me?" he demanded abruptly, looking up into her face, as she stood for a moment above him at the edge of the hollow, in which he had all but lost his life at the hands of Captain Castrique.

"Is the princess really your cousin?" she counter-questioned, perhaps to gain time, as she passed him on her way down the steep slope, ankle-deep in its drifted sand.

"I don't believe she is," he returned, a little aggrieved by her seeming lack of interest in the much more important aspect of his disclosure. But he noticed, also, that she did not appear in the least surprised by it, and had to infer that the princess must have confided in her already, which, of course, did not at all decrease the difficulties ahead of him. "We all call each other cousin," he exclaimed, "but in her case it must be a very remote degree indeed of real kinship. And I've never to my knowledge seen or spoken to her highness — before yesterday afternoon," he added, remembering opportunely the phrases with which the princess herself had put him to public confusion.

On the other slope of the hollow were lying both the butterfly-nets, which the two girls had discarded in their haste to succor him. He picked them up, and struck the butts of the poles deep into the soft sand as a mark of emphasis.

"But I'm going to do my imperial uncle one in the wing," he said, darkly. "Don't you think it's too bad, Miss Rosewarne, that we shouldn't be free — ?"

"But, surely, if you were free — I couldn't imagine any man not falling in love with the princess at sight," interrupted Noreen Rosewarne, loyal to her absent friend. "I think you are very lucky to

have it all made so easy for you by his majesty. You cannot but be happy with her."

"'But' is always a word too many, to my way of thinking," the prince asserted. "It is most certainly so in this case. I cannot be happy with the princess — because I want someone else for my wife, Miss Rosewarne: if someone else will only be sensible, and marry me. And, what's more, I don't believe for a moment that I'm the sort of husband the princess would care for at all."

"Why not ask her that question?" suggested Noreen Rosewarne, not to be cajoled into any expression of her own opinion as to a matter that was no concern of hers.

"Because what with my old uncle shoving his finger into our pie, and my being very evidently more than a bit a natural-born idiot," the prince explained with naïvely colloquial frankness, "it might be more than a little dangerous for us both, if I were to do so. There's only one girl in the world that I'm going to ask anything of that sort." His would-be jocular tone failed him dismally; he started forward, forgetful of all else in his eagerness, his injured hand clenched, the other held out to her. "That's the girl I want to marry — and that's you, dear," he said, with a desperate sincerity that could only carry conviction.

But she had drawn back, eyes downcast, startled even, it might have appeared, afraid.

"Listen, dear," he begged, halting, hurt, as she shrank away, "and forgive me if I've frightened

you. But my time here is too short to allow of any delay, and my whole life now depends on how you may answer me. It isn't on any mere momentary impulse that I have spoken, believe me. You've never been out of my thoughts since — "

"Since Mr. Baxendale took the 'Painted Lady' to Jetland," she interjected, flushing shamefacedly as she repeated the uncomplimentary soubriquet bestowed on her by the purple emperor.

"Since the moment when I first set eyes on her," he admitted, banning fiercely under his breath his imperial relative, "I've known I could never be happy till I should find you. And, now I've found you, I'll be a thousand-fold worse off, if — I've come a long way to seek you, sweetheart, for the sake of that picture."

He knew how halting and impotent were those broken sentences, but he could not better them. He had grown tongue-tied under the influence of feelings that had in an instant mastered all his habitual self-restraint. He stood silent for a moment or two, regarding her, a mere slip of a girl in comparison with his inches, with wistful, anxious eyes. "Isn't there any hope at all for me?" he asked, in a humble whisper, since she seemed to have nothing to answer him, and she at length looked up at him again.

"How could there be!" she said, slowly. "You will marry the Princess Ingrid, of course, and — you can be nothing to me."

"I won't," he retorted determinedly, "so — "

"But what will his majesty have to say to that?" she demanded, not to be turned from her own straight course.

"Nothing that will make any difference in the end. He will have to find her another husband, that's all, if she is agreeable to abide by his choice. But I'm not, and I don't believe she is, either. So, you needn't be in the least afraid of anything my uncle may say or do."

"I'm not in the least afraid of his majesty," she told him, and absolutely without bravado. "I'm quite independent, you see, and I intend to remain so."

"You would be no less independent with me," he argued, desperately. "The emperor will no doubt exile me, if I marry against his wishes. In fact, he's already informed me that I must forfeit my present position in life, if I do so; and, then, I'll be perfectly free."

"But, surely, that would be a price too heavy to pay for such freedom," she remonstrated.

"For freedom alone, perhaps," he assented, to humor her, "but not for freedom to share with you."

"Do you really think I'm worth such a sacrifice?" she asked more softly, although her steady eyes still held him at arm's length.

"You're worth the whole world to me," he maintained, and the flicker of hope in his heart flamed up again, as she faintly smiled.

But she withstood him. She would not capitulate. Argument and entreaty alike failed of any effect.

"You will soon forget me," she said finally, "and marry the princess. It will be best so, believe me. We are all in our own degree the creatures of circumstance, and fate will not permit of your marrying an American girl. I am sorry for you, since you seem to wish it so much, but I must act as my conscience dictates."

"And your heart?" he whispered, despairingly. "Is that at one with your conscience? Has it nothing to say for me?"

A warm color flooded her face, and her eyes fell again before his at that impetuous question. But she shook her head, and moved onward. "If it had," she answered, as if in reproach, "should I set conscience aside?" And, with that enigmatic conclusion, he had to be content for the time being.

He turned it over vexedly in his mind as he followed her up the opposite slope, to where he had been lying among the bushes when he first saw her.

"What was it you lost here?" she asked more levelly, and, peering into the undergrowth, caught sight of the pistol, which Captain Castrique had cunningly thrown down beside him. "Was it that?" She pointed it out to him, and shuddered in spite of herself over the grim possibilities of which it had served to remind her. He nodded indifferently, and, having satisfied himself by means of a swift glance that the missing note-case need not be looked for there, pocketed the pistol, picked up the butterfly-nets below, and turned back with her toward the lake, speechless, utterly cast down.

There was no breath of wind to mar the mirror-like smoothness of the water. It lay like a lake of molten metal under the red reflection of the setting sun. The silence of those solitudes was unbroken but for the faint squish of their footsteps on the soft sand. Elsewhere, there was no least sign of life or movement. They might have been alone in some remote desert.

The prince helped his companion to launch the canoe again, and led it along the shore to a ledge of rock, that she might not wet her feet. And, while he waded with it through the shallows, head bent, disconsolate beyond expression, she watched him from the shore. Paddling him slowly homeward, she set herself to prove to him, as a girl sometimes will at such a moment, that providence ordains all for the best. But he, like most young men in a similar predicament, was by no means to be comforted with that platitude, and contested it stubbornly.

"Providence helps those who help themselves," he informed her, with an attempt at a smile, inspirited, perhaps, by that wise saying; and she fell silent again.

The crimson glow of the sunset had not yet faded, but the full moon was already rising from behind a belt of firs on the opposite shore, when they at length turned in toward the dock at the base of the bluff on which the white cottage stood and seemed to be peering inquisitively over at them. The prince was first out of the canoe, and had it tied

up before Noreen Rosewarne moved. She was gazing backward, along the radiant pathway that led clear across the lake to the silver crescent growing above the tree-tops. She sighed faintly, over the ethereal beauty of it perhaps, as she took the hand the prince held out to her and stepped lightly ashore. And, hearing that sigh, and with his head filled by far other sentiments than appreciation of the scenery, he lost all command of himself. He drew her into the crook of his arm, and held her there, so that he could feel her heart fluttering like a captured bird's, while he looked down into her face with starving eyes.

"Dear," he said desperately, "I can't give you up. I'd dare even your displeasure to —" There was no more to be heard, but what the moon saw was a bent head above an uplifted one, two pairs of lips that met, and lingered, and parted reluctantly, a girl who stepped back, one hand at her bosom, against the rock wall behind her, a young man who stood where he was, staring at her so fondly and foolishly that even the moon, mistress of all such mysteries since the world first was, seemed to smile on that particular couple more mirthfully than ever before.

It may have been the light of the full moon that was making the girl's eyes sparkle mistily, like twin stars. It might have been merely anger at his audacity, but that, when the young man would have appeased with abject appeals for forgiveness any

such feeling on her part, she smiled as if still a little bewildered, and then laughed outright in very lightness of heart.

"Is that how providence helps those who help themselves?" said she, in a tone that, while somewhat tremulous, none the less told him all he needed to know at this moment.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE

"WHAT a beautiful world this is after all!" said the prince to himself, and smiled ecstatically even as he looked out at the driving rain and the dark, dripping belt of firs on the distant shore of the lake: whose waters no longer lay warm and still under a blue sky but would have reflected a lowering, wintry heaven had not they been so lashed and ruffled by the bitter wind blowing in from the sea, which was whistling shrilly about the white cottage in one of whose bedrooms the prince was snugly watching the storm from between his blankets, his window shut.

It was not, therefore, the actual aspect of the world about him that had called forth his involuntary expression of approval, but rather that great inward contentment with circumstances which had since the evening before enabled him to imagine a silver lining within each cloud. For him, the sun was still shining, the sky a clear azure. Disdaining the evidence of his own eyes, he was firmly convinced that he would never need an umbrella again. And that conviction was based on grounds by no means of the most stable. He had become an incurable optimist on the strength of a single kiss.

Noreen Rosewarne had allowed him no further opportunity to help himself — in so far as she was concerned — after he had followed her humbly but infinitely more hopeful up the steps from the dock. The princess had heard them coming, and appeared on the terrace as they reached the top. The Countess Considine was awaiting them on the piazza, and she took the prince in charge while the princess went off with her friend. He did not see either of the two girls again till the gong called them forth from their rooms to dinner.

At dinner, an intangible atmosphere of constraint once more seemed to have enveloped them all, and the prince could not but wonder whether the other two had been told how he had behaved. But a shy glance or two from Noreen reassured him on that point, and he finally put the prevailing depression down to the thunder in the still air outside, and was satisfied to suppress his own effervescent spirits until the morrow. That belief was confirmed by the fact that he was left alone at an early hour for the rest of the evening, on the general plea of headache. And he smoked resignedly in the lounge till long after midnight had struck, laying all his plans very carefully for next morning, lest he should lose any more time in following up the vast advantage he had so unexpectedly gained. And this, coupled with the lateness of day-break due to the storm, was no doubt why he did not wake on Monday till nearly half-past eight.

A maid brought his tea, and he found on the tray

a white envelope which, he knew intuitively, must be from Noreen. He ripped it open, read through the brief note it contained, and — The maid, turning on his bath in the room adjoining, started up in no little alarm at the dismayed exclamation that broke from his lips, and then smiled understandingly to herself, for she was very well disposed toward this genial, happy-go-lucky young man. And, as she heard him spring out of bed, she discreetly withdrew.

He read the note through a second time, standing at the window.

The princess has heard again from his majesty, and we must go to New York at once. Please excuse our hurried departure and make yourself comfortable here. The cottage is entirely at your disposal and the servants will all take their orders from you. You will also be quite safe from outside interference.

"What she means is the police," groaned the prince, "and I'll certainly have to keep them in mind. How can I get away!" he demanded of the empty air. "I haven't a penny in the wide world."

"*P. S.*" said the note, and it was the postscript that had really hurt him.

Please forget all that happened yesterday for your own sake.

The prince gazed at that with a tragic intensity, and then laid the note aside, in a safe place. And, if he had first kissed the square-lettered, characteristic signature fondly, is that to be held against him?

"I'll show you," said he, through set teeth, "whether I'm going to forget anything — for my own sake," and dashed through into his bath-room.

He reappeared in a marvelously short space of time, refreshed and mentally steadied by his cold plunge, dressed, packed his suit-case, pocketed the precious note, his only souvenir of his lost lady-love, and made for the lounge, always in a hurry. The time-table there informed him that the next train to town did not leave till afternoon — and it was then shortly after nine!

"Has the Countess Considine, also, gone to New York?" he demanded of a demure maid, the same who had brought him his tea, as she passed through from the breakfast-room.

"Yes, sir," she told him. "All the ladies have gone."

"By train?" he asked, a hopeful idea in his head.

But that was soon quenched as she answered:

"No, sir. They took the car. Your breakfast is served, sir."

"Thanks," said the prince, with a nod and a smile in spite of his sore disappointment.

He did not linger over the lavish meal provided for him, and, all the time he was eating, his mind was busy over the problem of how he was to obtain money enough to take him back to New York. He had hitherto intended to telegraph or write Ernst for further supplies, but not till the eve of his pre-arranged departure, lest by letting Ernst know earlier

where he was inconvenient consequences might be brought about. Now, it was too late even to telegraph and obtain a remittance before the first train. He was temporarily at his wits' end to know what to do in this most important matter. But he was none the less determined to travel by the first train.

Immediately after breakfast, he left the cottage, carrying his own suit-case, and took the road to the station. The rain had ceased, and the clouds were less closely packed. Now and then, a blink of watery sunshine would struggle through them. He had still a couple of hours or so in which to lay his hands on the necessary cash for his fare, and some half-formed impulse had caused him to slip into one of his pockets the tarnished pistol bequeathed to him for quite another purpose by Captain Castrique. He had been able to conceive no plan, but meant to get the money somehow.

Within the wild grounds that enclosed the cottage, he met only a woman, the wife of Noreen Rosewarne's mechanic, who lived in the lodge at the entrance gates.

"When do you expect your husband back from New York?" the prince asked her in his pleasant voice, and she answered him readily:

"He couldn't tell me how long he might be gone, sir. But I don't look for him before next week."

He frowned impatiently as he went on through the wet woods, and wished he could come across some man.

But the highroad when he came to it was no less desolate and untrodden on such a day than when he had first seen it. The inhabitants of that part of Long Island seemed to have settled into their winter sleep. But for an occasional sea-bird, he could see no living creature anywhere.

"I'll have to borrow a few dollars from the storekeeper or the station-agent," he told himself encouragingly, "and leave my suit-case as some sort of security." But, for any real hopes he had of obtaining such a loan, that was cold comfort, and he put off as long as possible the evil moment when he must most probably meet a curt refusal, and lingered by the way, solacing himself with an occasional cigar, till the morning train from New York appeared in the distance, punctually for once.

He had reached the roadside thicket where he had awaited Captain Castrique and Count Van Hoytema, and had still over half an hour in which to cover the short distance remaining.

"If I can't find the fare, I can at least get on the train, and travel so far for nothing," he cogitated. "Sufficient unto the hour is the trouble thereof, and — Hullo! What's this?"

The down-train had already left the station, and a very resplendent figure which had alighted from it was approaching the spot close to which the prince, from motives of prudence and to elude observation, had stepped aside into the scrub. The figure was that of a fat young man, very gorgeously got up

from head to foot, in a new derby of unusual curliness, a very wide-skirted, double-breasted overcoat of box-cloth with enormous buttons of mother-of-pearl, peg-top trousers of a color resembling mustard, and the most noteworthy of patent-leather shoes. In one pudgy hand, he was carrying a gigantic bouquet of hot-house flowers, in the other a lurid gold-mounted cane. His snub-nose was well in the air, on which, as he tripped along, he seemed to think he was also walking.

"I'll shoot that hippopotamus," said the prince, "if he doesn't part with some of his superfluous cash to such a deserving case as I undoubtedly am." And he fingered tentatively the pistol in his pocket as he stepped out into the roadway, confronting the gorgeous stranger squarely.

"Look here, my friend," said he in his most masterful tone, "I want some money from you. And I mean to have it. So, just shell out, will you — and look sharp. I've a train to catch."

The fat young man stared limply at him, breathing as a bronchial elephant might.

"For heaven's sake, Bolter!" he ejaculated. "You nearly scared me stiff, poppin' out of the hedge like that. I thought you were a highwayman. I'm most confoundedly sorry about that money, too. I meant to have paid it back the next day, but — I had another run of bad luck. I can let you have it now, of course — if you need it all. But I'm none too flush —"

"I want every penny of it," snapped the prince, who had on the instant grasped the facts of the situation, and he of the gaudy raiment, hanging his cane in the crook of one arm, reluctantly produced a well-filled note-case.

"What are you doin' down here?" he asked wheezily, while he counted into the prince's ready hand no less than three thousand dollars in crisp, clean bills.

"Never mind," returned the prince frostily. "What are you doing down here yourself? If it's a wedding you've come to, you may be thankful I haven't made it a funeral for you."

"You needn't be so stuffy," grumbled the other. "I've told you I meant to pay —"

"Never mind about that. What I asked was —"

"Well, it isn't any business of yours, but — d'you know if Noreen Rosewarne's still at her cottage here?"

"How should I know? They'll probably be able to tell you at the gate-lodge. It's only half a mile along. If you find her at home, don't say you saw me."

"You're getting precious eccentric, old chap!" muttered the fat young man, gloomily. "I don't quite understand you to-day."

"That's all right," remarked the prince, regaining control of his temper, which had been more than a little roused by the sound of Noreen Rosewarne's name on the lips of his evident rival. "Must be off now — there's my train signaled. Take great

care of yourself till I see you again. By-bye." And, recovering his suit-case from under a bush, he started for the station at a round pace.

The fat young man looked lamentingly after him.

"Well, I'll be blowed!" he exclaimed. "Bolter Baxendale — and hoofin' it down a dirty country road with his own baggage! He's certainly had a touch of the sun or somethin' of that sort abroad. Wish t' goodness I hadn't happened to meet him here." With this melancholy reflection, he went on his own way, picking his steps very carefully to meet such further misfortune as was still in store for him.

"He won't get back to New York till the two-fifty-five, anyhow," the prince soliloquized gleefully as he boarded the up-train at the station. "What a stupendous piece of luck it was meeting him! And just when I was in the mood to stir up more trouble for myself! Now, with three thousand dollars, I'm much better off than I was when I started. But — think of an egregious mastodon like that presuming to mention Noreen to me! I wonder what she's up to in New York?"

Immersed in such thoughts, he sat staring out of the window at the sodden landscape while the time passed imperceptibly till at length he became aware that the long journey was almost over. Approaching the outskirts of Long Island City, he recollected that in his present guise he would have to be very careful in case he should still encounter calamity at the hands of the New York police. At the terminus, he there-

fore got out with his coat-collar up to his ears, his hat pulled well down over his face, and, having checked his suit-case for delivery at the Waldorf, crossed the ferry flying light, not a little nervous as to what fate might await him on the other shore.

But fortune was still inclined to be kind, and he reached his hotel without hindrance. He laughed triumphantly to himself as he walked into his rooms again, and found everything there just as he had left it.

"My luck's in to-day," he told himself. "Bet you it won't be long before I find — her again. And I've two clear days yet before I need go back to the St. Regulus: though I'd like very well to know how old Bolter's getting along."

He changed his suit and shoes, still in a hurry, but now that he might not keep Dame Fortune waiting, and went out again to prospect for some sign that should lead him to the goal he aimed at. Nor, as it turned out, was he altogether mistaken in his optimism, for, as he strode purposefully down Fifth Avenue although without any very definite objective, he caught sight in the distance of three figures which he felt sure must be Noreen Rosewarne with the princess and the princess's companion. They were turning into a cross-street, and he was not slow in giving chase.

It was drizzling a little, and he had his umbrella up. That also helped to screen him from unfriendly recognition, but it hampered his progress sadly on the sidewalk. As he turned into the cross-street, he

lowered it — and was at once very sorry for that rash action. For the cross-street was empty, except for a policeman on the opposite side: and the policeman, who evidently meant to see something more of his features, was following him with hasty steps along the parallel sidewalk.

The prince looked prayerfully about him, in search of some avenue of escape. But there was none visible, and the policeman had quickened his pace, was crossing the street, would presently, he felt sure, lay upon his shoulder the heavy hand of the law, and therewith drag him off to durance. That possibility was not to be calmly contemplated.

The door of a decent brown-stone house a few yards ahead opened slightly. Someone was no doubt coming out. The prince broke into a despairing spurt, dashed up the steps there, and, pushing into the doorway, banged the door behind him just as his baffled pursuer, running for all he was worth, had reached the foot of the steps. It was a near thing for both.

"Doing a bolt from the blue, eh, Mr. Baxendale!" commented a cheery voice so close to the prince's elbow that he jumped aside in alarm.

Within the doorway all was darkness.

"I sort of saw you coming along in a bigger hurry than I've ever seen you in before, and, when I saw him, too, I just slipped down in a sort of hurry myself, and opened the door for you. Now, if it's anything short of manslaughter you're wanted for, perhaps I can help you to square the cop. Come inside,

anyhow, and I'll see what he has to say about it."

A single electric light, high overhead, was suddenly switched on, and the prince, amazed beyond measure, but no less devoutly grateful to his unknown benefactor, followed that portly individual without a word, across a wide vestibule sumptuously furnished with palms and marbles and pictures, all very dimly visible in that artificial twilight, into a comfortable room, half-library, half-office; where he was left to his own surprised reflections for a few moments while his rescuer returned to hold parley with the policeman, by now pounding irritably at the outer door with one hand while he rang the bell with the other, fortissimo and staccato.

He was quite evidently, the prince could gather from what went on, in a violent passion when he was at length admitted, and his irate voice was rather more than sufficiently audible to his disconcerted quarry.

"I tell ye, Jerry, we've been on the lookout for him sinst last Friday. He's wanted first for breach o' the peace — an' fightin' a duel — an' then for breaking arrest. An' it wasn't well done of yez at all to shut the dure in me face."

"It wasn't me that shut the door," returned "Jerry" soothingly. "And there's no harm done, anyhow, for — here he is to speak for himself. But, mark ye, Kelly! I count Mr. Baxendale an old friend of mine, and — there 's no need to be nasty about anything."

"'Tis not me wish to be nasty at all," returned the patrolman, appeased by the spectacle of the prince, quietly seated before the fire and still more amiably affected by the urbanity displayed toward him by them both. For while the astute Jerry Chancefield was getting him something to counteract the effects of the weather outside, the prince gravely discussed with him the crimes alleged against himself.

"You'd scarcely be justified, you see, in arresting any citizen on such charges," explained the prince in his most courteous tones. "No breach of the peace has apparently been committed. Your information as to a duel is evidently all moonshine. I did not break my arrest at all. Your plain-clothes friend met with an unfortunate accident, and — I had an important appointment elsewhere. I couldn't wait about while he got himself to rights. What happened on Friday is out of date by now.

"So, I'll tell you how I look at the matter. If you still feel that you want to arrest me, bring your warrant to the Waldorf at seven o'clock — and you'll find me there."

"And I'll hand you ten thousand dollars in gold if Mr. Baxendale doesn't happen to keep that appointment," Jerry Chancefield put in very opportunely.

"On the other hand, if you want to make trouble now — and without warrant of any sort — I'm willing. But — I'll make trouble, too."

He rose and looked down at the policeman, but Kelly was not to be cowed in that way.

"If I thought ye ought to go to th' station, sorr," he said mildly, "ye'd go, dead or alive. But, if I can count on ye at the Waldorf at seven, I'd just as lieve find out the rights of the case first."

"That's sound sense, Kelly," Jerry Chancefield approved, cheerfully. "And I'll go bail for Mr. Baxendale — so, that's settled. Fill up again. No? Oh, well, then — Of course, times are changed. See now, put this in your pocket, and say nothing more about it."

"It isn't graft I'm after, Mr. Chancefield," Kelly assured him, and was with difficulty prevailed upon to pocket the note. But the prince and Jerry Chancefield between them finally succeeded in persuading him to do so, and he departed, satisfied in every sense of the word.

"Tell your plain-clothes friend to call here and see Mr. Chancefield — if you don't have to come to the Waldorf," the prince called after him.

"Thank ye, sorr," said the voice of Kelly from the doorway.

"That was wise, Mr. Baxendale," Jerry Chancefield commented when he came back to the room. "Leave another fifty with me for the other fellow, and I'll lay you'll hear nothing more about it, unless you've really been breaking the law."

"Not a break," the prince assured him confidently, and, handing over to him the necessary hundred

dollars, "I'm infinitely obliged to you, Jerry," said he.

"That's all right," remarked Jerry Chancefield. "Say no more about it. Going to try your luck upstairs, now you're here? Help yourself to something, Mr. Baxendale, now, or when you come down."

A further light broke upon the prince's mind, and he at length realized where he was, who his hospitable entertainer must be. Baxendale had more than once spoken in Jetland of the famous gaming-house in New York.

"My luck's flukey to-day," he returned as he helped himself with a steady hand to a modest highball, "but — of course I came here to make a dollar or two."

"See you later then," said Jerry, chuckling as he turned to his desk, and the prince sauntered out of the room.

Even at that early hour, there were numerous votaries of the green cloth at the tables in various rooms the prince investigated as he made his way upstairs by degrees till he came to that at the top of the house, in which Bolter Baxendale's favorite diversion was already being played for the benefit of perhaps a dozen punters.

One of them waved a hand to him as he entered, and the others looked round at sound of the name by which his unknown acquaintance addressed him; but it was too late to draw back then, and, in any

case, he did not mean to remain more than a few minutes before resuming his interrupted quest. He looked on for a round or two, and then, remembering something of the policy Baxendale had more than once outlined to him, laid a hundred dollars on *Bolter*. It was his intention simply to lose a little money gracefully, for the benefit of the house which had proved such a haven to him, and he paid no great attention to the course of the game.

The exuberant youth who had hailed him from the other side of the table won fifty dollars, and, apparently satisfied with that coup, left his seat, and came round to the prince's elbow.

"What ho, old sport!" said he, and shook hands. "Where have you been these last two or three days? We've all been looking for you since we've found out that your friend, the prince imperial, is here."

"I don't know any prince imperial," answered the prince, as Baxendale would have done. "I've been out of town. What's the news?"

He pulled from his pocket a couple of bills to double his stake, tossed them down on the space sacred to *Bolter* and drew back from the table in response to a gesture from the other young man.

"Haven't you seen the papers?" asked that youth, with wide eyes, leading him confidently toward the window-seat. "Don't you know that the Prince of Jetland's at the St. Regulus — and that his cousin, the prince imperial, has married a dancing girl and abdicated? You've surely been laid away in moss since you landed. At any rate, your pal's prince impe-

rial now, and — Hello! Look there — Isn't that Geoffrey Paige's inamorata? Who's the other girl?"

The prince looked — and saw, on the doorstep of a house at the opposite side of the street, waiting till the footman behind them should have got his umbrella up to escort them down to their car through the drizzle, not Geoffrey Paige's inamorata, but his own good angel, Noreen Rosewarne, beside the Princess of Marque. A third figure, no doubt that of the Countess Considine, was visible in the background.

He did not pause to express to his new-found friend his caustic opinion of that young gentleman's conduct and conversation, but dashed headlong from the room, down the stairs, and, snatching up his coat and hat in the vestibule, darted out into the street.

The car had already gone on its way, but that did not altogether discourage him. He reached the house opposite at a run, and rang the bell till the door was opened to him.

"Where have Miss Rosewarne and her Highness of Marque gone in the car?" he demanded in a peremptory tone of the scandalized footman who answered it. "Speak up. Don't stand there staring at me. I have important business with them."

"I believe they've gone to the St. Regulus, sir," the man answered at once, impressed by his air of authority. "I know they have cards for His Imperial Highness of Jetland's reception there."

The prince pulled out his watch. It was getting

on for seven. He turned away abruptly to look for a cab since he must get back to the Waldorf on time. And, as he tramped along in the rain, his mind was filled with an unreasoning fury against his fate, a sudden, consuming hatred of his cousin, Ughtred of Utgard.

"And I'm to be prince imperial!" said he bitterly to himself. "My hopes of happiness are all to be sacrificed — for the sake of a dancing-girl! But — you wait and see. My name isn't Mud at all — and I'll maybe astonish some of you yet, my friends!"

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

LÈSE-MAJESTÉ

THAT was what *The American Eagle* called one unfortunate incident that occurred at His Imperial Highness of Jetland's reception at the St. Regulus: an incident which, but for the tact displayed by his imperial highness — to quote from the text of the report which occupied six special sheets of its stop-press morning edition — might have from the first marred an evening that will for all time be memorable in American history.

Space will not permit of my reproducing here in full Lester Burdick's admirable account of the brilliant function contrived by the purple emperor's astute ambassador for the furtherance of his majesty's imperial policy. But I, who also was present, may perhaps be allowed to tell in my own inefficient way what happened after the first of the guests began to arrive.

The stage, so to speak, was very gorgeously set for that scene. The ambassador had given the management of the St. Regulus *carte blanche* in the matter of expenditure, and the St. Regulus had risen to the occasion. The façade of the vast building was resplendent in illuminated devices, which lighted up Fifth Avenue and the cross-street that leads past

the hotel so that the multitude of special police on duty there found it comparatively easy to control a crowd which otherwise would soon have blocked the traffic altogether. For it seemed as if the four million had assembled to see the Four Hundred drive up and alight and pass within to where history was in the making. Fifth Avenue from Forty-second Street as far as Central Park was black with drenched onlookers.

In front of the hotel and in the cross-street, a clear space was maintained by a cordon of mounted men. The sidewalk there was carpeted and covered in with awnings, so that a dozen carriages and cars could simultaneously disgorge their occupants and draw away without the loss of a moment. And the Four Hundred — ten times multiplied — were not late in arriving. The story of *A Royal Romance,* as set forth the day before by Lester Burdick, had stirred their interest and curiosity to the depths.

The vestibule within was a veritable bower, and in the parlors beyond, where those who had passed through the cloak-rooms awaited their turn to go up in one or another of the elevators — for the perfection of system reigned everywhere — the women's costumes, interspersed with here and there among the black coats of the men some gay foreign uniform or the broad riband of some order, made a perfect blaze of color against the white background of blossom. At every point where they could possibly be required stood footmen, in the imperial livery: a credit, as were indeed all the arrangements

to the ambassador's acquired capacity for hustling the stage-management.

Others awaited the guests at the elevator-entrance to the prince's apartment, which now comprised that entire floor of the hotel, convoyed them by slow degrees toward the thronged audience-chamber, proclaiming them first to Rear-Admiral Agassiz, after whom they had to pass Major-General Mandarin and finally meet the scrutinizing bow of the Baron Carquois. The ambassador had strictly charged the gentlemen of the prince's suite to see to it that no one of unsatisfactory appearance or credentials should be allowed to approach his imperial highness. And in inconspicuous corners there were keen-eyed detectives in evening dress to aid and abet them in this necessary precaution.

Among the fashionable throng slowly filtering through the various anterooms were several of Baxendale's friends and acquaintances. Cullen Seabury and his sister had just arrived, Huldah radiantly happy with her big brother, Seabury very smart in his regimentals but, perhaps, a little bored. Oscar Quayle had almost disorganized the ambassador's perfect system by refusing to enter the elevator in his ticketed turn, till Mrs. Delancy should come forth from the cloak-room. But the system was saved by his exchanging tickets with Beverly Caffyn.

"I saw Bolter Baxendale at Jerry's this afternoon," Caffyn whispered to him as they parted. "There's something queer about him these days.

Keep an eye on him if he turns up here, and let me know if you notice anything." And Oscar Quayle frowned after him, a frown of corroboration.

Ethel Van Rooyen came in with her mother, and braved that estimable lady's displeasure in so far as to whisper to Mr. Quayle in passing.

"She won't be long now." For which information he thanked her with a friendly smile.

Presently, Mrs. Delancy appeared with Nesca Carteret under her wing, both very bright-eyed, good-looking girls. R. Rufus Caffyn, back in New York on his way to Europe again, for once breaking his rule against going into society, had come to shake hands with the future potentate of the purple empire, and was looking about him somewhat impatiently as he saw how slow his progress must be. And, still puffing after a hasty, but characteristic, toilette, since he had not been able to return from Bitter Creek till late, Geoffrey Paige might be seen nodding sulkily to one or two of the other notabilities present. From all quarters of the country within reach of the St. Regulus, they had gathered in response to the ambassador's summons, and among the brains and beauty and wealth the gathering represented, Geoffrey Paige would have had no part but for the fact that he bore a name no one would willingly have slighted.

He followed Rufus Caffyn into the elevator along with some junior members of the *corps diplomatique* whose smiling assurance he secretly envied them,

and, ignoring the half-nod bestowed on him for his father's sake by the famous financier, shook hands with Rear-Admiral Agassiz, somewhat to that gentleman's surprise, as he stepped out on the floor above. Then, he caught the eye of a detective whose face was familiar to him, and flushed and scowled furiously. For two pins, he told himself, he would have chucked the whole thing, but he wanted to see Noreen Rosewarne, and he was not to be balked again in that purpose. He might have something to say to Bolter Baxendale, too, confound the fellow, if he should happen to catch sight of that tricky gentleman; for he had found out at the gate-lodge of Nahuel Huapi that Bolter Baxendale had been staying there and had been very well aware this morning that Noreen Rosewarne had left, consequently he himself was not, therefore, in any amiable temper.

He passed with the tide through the anterooms in which were stationed Major-General Mandarin and the Baron Carquois, and had almost reached the crimson-curtained double doorway beyond which was the chamber of audience and at which a gray-haired, middle-aged man with mutton-chop whiskers, in full court livery with a great gold chain of office about his neck, was announcing each new arrival in a voice that seemed scarcely robust enough for such an occasion, when there was some stir behind him. He looked around. The throng was separating so as to permit a clear passage for the two ladies whom Rear-Admiral Agassiz had left his post

to precede with all proper ceremony to the prince's presence.

"Way, if you please, for Her Highness of Marque and the Lesser Isles," said the Rear-Admiral in a voice that procured him instant attention, and, but for Geoffrey Paige, his path was clear. That slow-witted youth, however, was too busy staring at the princess's companion to heed him, and did not move until Rufus Caffyn, among the crowd, pulled him forcibly aside.

The princess and Noreen Rosewarne passed on. The ranks behind them closed up again, all eager to catch a glimpse of the to-be-historic meeting between the two royal romancers. But Mr. Paige, not to be put down by any mere guinea-pig, pushed forward after the two girls, was just in time to tread on the princess's train, as, having been duly heralded by the groom of the chambers, she and her friend were about to proceed up the open crimson pathway which led from the doors to the dais on which His Imperial Highness of Jetland was standing. He had risen at the sound of their names, was visible to everyone as a haggard, harassed-looking young man, who, in his becoming uniform, all stars and steel and gold, and but for the fact that he seemed to be suffering under some dire mental stress, would have filled the part of a poster-prince to perfection.

Under his somber eyes and a thousand besides, the Princess of Marque turned and looked as would any woman in such circumstance at the luckless

Geoffrey Paige. Her companion had not noticed that she had paused, was already almost half-way to the dais. Rufus Caffyn reached out again, and summarily removed from her skirt the paralyzed perpetrator of the mischance. The princess smiled again, and, having nodded her thanks for this aid, went on.

The prince summoned up a smile for her reception, and she kissed hands with a graceful curtsey, amid a silence only disturbed by the stertorous breathing of Geoffrey Paige, in the extreme background. And that historical moment might so have become history, but for some disturbance that suddenly became audible from the rear of the anterooms in the absence of Rear-Admiral Agassiz.

"*Laissez-moi passer,*" cried an angry voice, hearing which the prince, on the point of addressing some word of welcome to his fair cousin, looked up aghast, stared over the heads of the throng facing him from the double doorway as though he had seen some ghost in the distance beyond. All eyes were turned in that direction, but no one else spoke. The voice could be heard more clearly now, demanding instant admittance to the audience-chamber, and with it were mingled the puzzled tones of Major-General Mandarin, pathetic entreaties on the part of the Baron Carquois.

A ripple of movement was visible among the packed concourse that had not yet passed the portals of the audience-chamber, to which the elevators had added several carloads during that brief interval.

It parted again, with some difficulty and from its fore-front emerged the ambassador, sadly afflicted in mind by such a contretemps coming on top of the fact that he had, by the worst of luck, arrived too late to play any part in the most important act of the pageant which he himself had been at such pains to arrange. It should have been his privilege to escort the princess into the presence of the prince imperial, but an accident to his car, in which he himself had suffered a cut face, had cost him that. And here he was now, embroiled with a foppish-looking young exquisite in a great state of excitement, who, the Baron Carquois had credibly informed him, was the Count Van Hoytema of his imperial highness's personal suite, and to whom, although the count was neither in court costume nor evening dress, admittance to the reception could not be refused, especially on a plea of business affecting not only the prince imperial but even the purple empire itself.

These two, then, made their appearance together, and marched side by side, followed closely by the Baron Carquois and Major-General Mandarin, up the crimson carpet between the serried ranks of the surprised Four Hundred, the groom of the chambers staring after the Count Van Hoytema like a man in a trance, visibly unable to announce even the disgusted ambassador as he ought. A breathless silence had overwhelmed the assemblage, and no one moved. There seemed to be some dire mystery in the air.

The princess looked round, and stepped a little to one side as they approached. At the edge of the dais, the ambassador laid a restraining hand on the Count Van Hoytema's arm, or that regardless firebrand would no doubt have stepped upon it, and thus confronted the prince. Even as it was, he had set one rash foot on its velvet covering, and with his free hand was pointing fiercely up at the prince, who was regarding him as though he had been some basilisk-eyed messenger of the Furies.

"That man's an impostor," burbled the Count Van Hoytema in a falsetto crescendo, which made the last word almost a scream. "The Prince of Jetland is dead. I with my own eyes saw him die — in your place, M. Baxendale!"

Fate hung on the moment. No one had heard a door in the paneling at one side of the dais open softly. But everyone heard very clearly a pleasant voice, at which everyone turned toward the corner whence it had come, that said with perfect aplomb:

"Who's taking my name in vain over there? Look to that fellow. He must be mad. Stand to the prince, gentlemen!"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE DELUGE

OF all the agonies of mind endured by Bolter Baxendale since Ernst Coicu had come to him with word of the prince imperial's death at the hands of Captain Castrique, news that had first reached Ernst by way of the back-stairs, up which Count Van Hoytema's servant had lately crept to collect his master's belongings, none had been keener or more hurtful than those he suffered while he faced the Four Hundred in the place of his dead friend.

He had, indeed, only decided at the last moment that he must go through with this gruesome farce, at whatever cost to himself, in faithful fulfilment of the trust Juric had imposed on him, to save as far as might be the scandal that seemed almost inevitable. But he hoped that, by doing so till he should have an opportunity of confiding in the ambassador all the facts of the case, the clever diplomatist might still be able to find some emergency exit from the blind alley into which circumstances had so cruelly forced them, and perhaps without incurring all that noisome publicity which would have followed any immediate disclosure.

Ernst had succeeded in frightening his two fellow-servants, who now shared the secret, into a scared silence as to the fate that had befallen the supposed Mr. Baxendale. Baxendale, himself prepared for the worst, bade him hope for the best, and by degrees got him braced into some semblance of his former self. There was not time left in which to take any other steps. The Baron Carquois came in to announce that the guests had already begun to gather below. The two assumed their respective posts, and the reception commenced.

It was all like some blood-curdling nightmare to Baxendale. He saw, amid the seemingly endless procession that streamed in past the dazed Ernst at the double doorway, faces which should have been of friends, but with eyes showing no faintest sign of recognition as they came forward and bowed before him, and passed to one side to make way for more and yet more. He hoped he would be able to hold out till the ambassador should make his appearance with the princess, though he scarcely knew how he could now receive. But, after an age-long interval of such torture, he saw far off, across that sea of faces, the fair features of one who, he prayed, would vouchsafe him at least a friendly glance. It was the princess, and attended only by Noreen Rosewarne. Neither the ambassador nor the Countess Considine was with her.

He nerved himself to meet her smilingly, and would have had her step to the dais beside him, but she stooped and kissed his hand, held back, and

stepped aside. Speech failed him altogether. He could find no least word to say to her before all those staring folk, and scarcely knew what was happening, till he heard a loud voice raised somewhere in the background, and the ambassador at length appeared, with Count Van Hoytema.

At sight of the count, dismay overcame him, and he stood witlessly where he was, unable even to think, till the no less over-wrought accomplice of Captain Castrique had branded him with a charge he could not deny. But, at sight of the man they had both believed to be dead, at the sound of his level voice giving that charge the lie, the pressure on Baxendale's brain became suddenly relaxed; he laughed. Such belated relief had been almost too much for him.

A dozen men had sprung between him and the luckless Count Van Hoytema, whom the ambassador had already seized, quite prepared for a frantic struggle with that no doubt dangerous lunatic. But the count offered no resistance. With his mouth wide, an image of imbecile confusion and fear, he was gaping at the man he himself had seen shot dead at Nahuel Huapi, whose lifeless body he himself had helped to hide in the undergrowth. The prince had made his way to the dais, was shaking hands with Baxendale in the most natural manner possible.

About them, the buzz and rustle of low-toned speech and movement had succeeded the tense, silent strain of the moment before. The princess's

pale face had recovered its color; she was even smiling bravely at something Noreen Rosewarne had said, and the other women present, seeing that all was now well, refrained from a prevalent tendency to hysteria, were more disposed to be outwardly amused over the mystery, which none of them yet understood.

Professor Jocrisse was one of those who had intervened between the count and his victim. The prince exchanged a telegraphic glance with Baxendale, and Baxendale, his wits once more at his own command, although still a little disposed to go woolgathering among these marvelous happenings, was not slow to understand it. He turned to the professor, and spoke, in that wiseacre's own tongue.

"Will you please take charge of Count Van Hoytema. Keep him in the room behind this, till I join you, and see that no one else enters. Pay no attention to anything he may say, and I'll be in as soon as I have received the rest of my guests."

The professor scratched his head reflectively, and came to the prompt conclusion that he had better obey. He cleared his throat as a preliminary to undertaking the duty thus peremptorily imposed on him, and, before the consequent alarm and confusion had quite subsided, disappeared with his patient through the doorway in the paneling. The supposititious Baxendale had evidently gone with them, for he was no longer visible, while Ernst Coicu had taken the same opportunity to desert his post in the distance.

But, with the ambassador now on the spot, system was speedily restored. The Baron Corquois and his companions once more took up their tasks, a substitute was at once provided for Ernst, and the human stream was soon flowing toward the dais again, as smoothly as if it had never been interrupted. Baxendale played his part there in a very different spirit, consumed with impatience to get away from it though he was. The congestion in the audience-chamber had been relieved by the opportune opening of the ball-room, where the prince was presently to lead off a cotillion with the princess. That had been a bright idea from the ambassador, now chatting cheerfully at one side of the dais with the princess and Noreen Rosewarne and the Countess Considine, who had at last arrived and made her bow.

The other late arrivals also had all at length filed past the resplendent young man they had come to see, and heartily thankful he was when the procession finally came to an end. He looked round for the princess, in the hope of a parting word with her, but she had gone off elsewhere with her friends, leaving the ambassador to the uninterrupted discharge of his functions.

Baxendale signed to him.

"You must keep things going without me now for half an hour," he whispered, and immediately made for the door in the paneling. The ambassador looked after him with a benevolent smile, and turned toward one of the groups in the neighborhood of the dais.

"In half an hour, his imperial highness will open the ball with her highness," he observed, conversationally. "He is at present in consultation with Professor Jocrisse as to that unfortunate gentleman of his suite, who —" He shrugged his shoulders explanatorily, and passed on, very well pleased indeed with himself, to disseminate the information.

In the cupboard-like room behind, Baxendale found Professor Jocrisse silently regarding the crestfallen Count Van Hoytema, who scarcely looked up as he entered. The professor rose and tendered him an envelope, which contained a hasty note from the prince.

"I'm in your old rooms upstairs," it said. "Ring me up there. I've muzzled Van Hoytema, so don't say a word to him. Leave him where he is with Jocrisse."

It was Ernst who answered Baxendale's call.

"I'll be down instantly," he promised, and almost at once made his appearance. But for him, Baxendale might have had more difficulty in convincing the professor that he himself was to be trusted a little further beyond that perplexed mental expert's ken, and it was only subject to their solemn promise to return within half an hour that Jocrisse at last and very reluctantly agreed to their leaving him there. Whereupon, Ernst led the way at his best speed up flight after flight of a servant's staircase, which finally brought them, breathlessly, out into Baxendale's former rooms.

The prince, in his underclothes, his head a mass of

soapsuds, turned from the wash-stand, rushed forward as he heard their hasty footsteps, and wrung his friend's hand until that sufferer from his erratic conduct almost winced.

"I've had the time of my life, Bolter, old boy!" cried he, and reached for a towel, which he thrust into Baxendale's now dripping fingers. "I don't know how I can ever thank you for all the favors you've done me. . . . Ernst, you scoundrel, get Mr. Baxendale a clean shirt ready, and lay out a fresh suit of evening clothes. We can talk while we're changing, Bolter, and that old buffer's thoroughly to be trusted, in any case."

But Ernst was already in the next room, and Baxendale was very busy, divesting himself of the close-fitting uniform in which he had suffered such stress of mind that he had thought more than once it would suffocate him.

"I thought you were dead," he said dully, resentful a little, now that his tribulations in this respect were at an end. "Why didn't you let me know? These last few hours have made an old man of me."

"Ernst has told me more or less of what's been going on," said the prince, somewhat dashed by this evident depression, "and I'm more sorry than I can tell you for all the trouble you've had. It was some loose-tongued servant of that fool Van Hoytema's colloguing with the valet you had up here, who gave the show away as well as he could, or you would never have been worried. But you're

not going to blame me for their fault, are you? I really thought I had everything fixed up in the most workmanlike way. And you got me into a bit of a mix-up, too, when you put your newspaper friend on to have me arrested. I might have lost the chance of a lifetime through that, but I'm not blaming you.

"On the contrary, I've squared the police for you. Your reputation's practically improved in my hands. I've done nothing that need bring a blush even to your cheek. And here I am back from the Waldorf with your baggage, two days before I was due. So, now, we can carry on again as we were, unless you're really annoyed with me about anything." He paused in the act of pulling on the breeches Baxendale had already bestowed on him to scan that aggrieved gentleman's features anxiously. And Baxendale could not withstand this appeal to their former friendship. He was still sore of mind, but it was with circumstances over which the prince could have no control.

"Of course, I'm not really annoyed," he said, in a tone that carried conviction, "but I've been a good deal worried with one thing and another of late. Never mind me. Tell me what you've been up to for the last three days, if you like."

The prince needed no second invitation. He launched forth into a laughing account of all his fortunes and misfortunes since he had left his friend still ruminating undecidedly over the breakfast-table on the Friday before. And Baxendale,

too, amused by the invincible audacity with which his friend had surmounted every obstacle in the way, was soon laughing. He seemed to be especially pleased by the ill-success of the prince's attempt to pass in his place with the two girls at Nahuel Huapi. But he grew very grave again as he heard what had happened between his companion and Noreen Rosewarne.

"You must have been quite mad, Juric," he said, "to plunge like that on such short acquaintance. And, anyhow, it's quite hopeless. The emperor's not to be moved. He's half-frantic since Ughtred of Utgard cut loose: I've had to translate whole sheaves of cablegrams from him. And the latest news is that he's sending a fleet across to take you and the Princess Ingrid straight home. He's going to make you marry her, if he has to move heaven and earth."

The prince, hurriedly buttoning his tunic, paused in the operation long enough to shake a fist fiercely in the air.

"Confusion!" he cried. "You'd make a saint angry, Bolter. Have I not told you already that I'm going to marry Noreen Rosewarne, and you sit there talking like — Tell me! You've seen enough of both those girls to have a very good idea. Now, which of them would you marry, if, just for the sake of the argument, you could have your choice?"

Baxendale flushed under his tan, and he could not at once meet his friend's imperative eyes. But

any hesitancy could only add to his confusion, and he looked up, hard driven as he was.

"The princess," said he, with desperate honesty, his voice a little choked.

The prince was once more regarding him with intent concern.

"You haven't fallen in love with her yourself, have you, Bolter, old boy?" he asked in a tone of friendly commiseration, and then whistled softly at what he could see expressed with such startling clearness in the other's unhappy face.

"Phew!" he exclaimed. "It never rains, but it pours. And this looks to me most infernally like the deluge! But, of course, you can count on me though it should snow ink — you know that, don't you, Bolter? Why under heaven did you not tell me before? And you've been advising me all the time to — "

Ernst came in from the next room, and for a time no more could be said on the subject. For Baxendale's temporary mustache had to be transferred to the prince, and only Ernst could be trusted to fix it safely. That done, Juric of Jetland was himself again, and it only remained for Baxendale to get rid of the dye in his hair, a matter to which, also, Ernst was presently to attend, and finish dressing. For the moment, they let Ernst go again, and the prince continued:

"I don't quite know what's to be done — unless you two take a lesson from Ughtred and me. But

we'll have to fix it up somehow, Bolter. It's — "

"It's a matter that we may as well drop," Baxendale interrupted, "because nothing will ever come of it. I — I wouldn't ask any woman to make any such sacrifice for me. And there are other reasons as well. So, you must do as you think best for yourself, Juric."

"I've told you already what I'm going to do," said the prince doggedly, and Ernst once more intervened. He had in one hand the bundle of bills he had found in a pocket of the evening suit that the prince had been wearing, and would have laid them aside. "Here!" called the prince, and took them from the servant. "That reminds me, Bolter. I got three thousand dollars from a fat young friend of yours at Bitter Creek this forenoon. It seemed that he owed you the money somehow, and I needed it."

"That must have been Geoffrey Paige," Baxendale reflected. "He's no particular friend of mine."

"Nor of mine," the prince agreed promptly, recalling the errand that had evidently taken his rival to Nahuel Huapi. "Anyhow, I had got rid of the thousand or so I first inherited from you, and this little lot came in most remarkably useful. It brought me back to New York, and helped me to smooth away all ill-feeling on the part of your admirable police force. I lost a hundred or two at Chancefield's over your favorite game, just for the good of the house. I took rather a liking to Jerry himself: he seems to me a straight sort. Then, I paid my

little bill at the Waldorf, and here's what's left. Ernst, I owe Mr. Baxendale about three thousand dollars. Settle that debt with him before he leaves the room."

"At once, highness," promised Ernst, smirking happily in the background. He, too, had been sorely tried by the events of that evening, and was finding it difficult now to maintain a proper official solemnity of demeanor. At once, now, he retired to obtain the necessary amount.

"I seem to have been doing myself with commendable economy," commented the prince, idly turning over the notes, which might have amounted to twenty-five or twenty-six hundred dollars. "That reminds me — I must send the maids at Nahuel Huapi something: I'd almost forgotten." When Ernst returned; "Did I say three thousand?" he asked. "I only need two thousand, and — yes, that's right." He added the fresh bills to the roll, and handed it to Baxendale. But Baxendale laughingly returned about five hundred dollars to Ernst.

"You'll never make your own living as an accountant, Juric," said he. "This is all you owe me. I only spent twenty or thirty dollars of yours."

"I don't believe I ever will," the prince assented. "I have no head for figures, and, by the way, I lost your note-case in the course of my travels. I'll have to buy you a new one."

"You'd better be off downstairs again," advised Baxendale. "I promised Jocrisse you'd be back within half an hour. And you'll see to it now that

neither Van Hoytema nor Castrique gets talking about anything."

"I'll fix them both up properly," the prince declared, with perfect self-confidence. "Castrique's off to South America already. He left that other ass behind to bring on their mutual baggage. Trust me to attend to them.

"So, I'll see you again presently. Ernst, see if the corridor's clear, and I'll make a dash for it. . . . And keep your courage up, Bolter, till I've time to lend you a hand with your affairs, as you've done for me. I'm simply chock-full of gratitude to you."

"Oh, never mind about that," begged Baxendale. "There's one kindness you can do me, and that is to forget what I've been foolish enough to tell you. It's no use, Juric. And I sha'n't be seeing you again to-night. I can't face that crowd again, and so, good-luck to you." He could not forbear that conventional valediction. For, even while he knew that his own case was hopeless, the last faint spark of hope in his heart had been fanned into a tiny flame by his friend's stiff-necked refusal to bow to the emperor's yoke, and this utterly refused to be quenched.

The prince once more regarded him with grave sympathy.

"Take my tip, and come downstairs to the dance," he said; and he hurried off in response to an urgent whisper from Ernst.

Professor Jocrisse was very apparently pleased to see him again, and he paused in passing through

to the audience-chamber to make some further arrangement for the safe-guarding of Count Van Hoytema. By this time, however, the count had recovered his faculties, and, since he was of course perfectly sane, the prince, after a very stern conversation with him, accepted his word of honor to remain within his own rooms without surveillance, pending further explanation and consideration of his most scandalous conduct. That settled, the prince went out again among his guests.

He found the ambassador eagerly awaiting him. In the ball-room, the strings were already throbbing invitingly.

"But it's early enough yet," the prince demurred in response to a low-toned suggestion; "and, what's more, I don't know whether her highness is willing to lead the cotillion with me. Wait for another quarter of an hour, and I'll fix things up." And he moved onward, with a pleasant smile and a bow for any and all who happened to catch his roving eye, but not to be detained or lured into conversation. Only one man among the multitude of men and women there succeeded in stopping him for a moment, and that was Lester Burdick.

"I hope my releasing that story hasn't done you a great deal of harm, after all, prince," the newspaper man remarked, intercepting him with practised ease, as he strolled through one of the anterooms, followed by not a few admiring or envious glances. "I couldn't hold it any longer, you see. And I had to fix it all up on the train, too. . . . I've

scarcely had an hour's sleep since I saw you last."

"What's spoiled my sleep," grumbled the prince, but not unamiably, "is the fact that your 'story' is altogether too previous. No record of events printed before they have taken place is likely to be altogether reliable. And you didn't, after all, succeed in holding up our friend, Mr. Baxendale!"

Lester Burdick almost blushed, so little did he like the idea that he had not made good in that direction, also — for had he not, in some sense, boasted to the prince of the power of the press?

"I kept that out of the paper anyhow," he said ruefully, "and no harm has happened. But, if I hadn't been wasting my time in the train to Palm Beach, I'd probably know better what to think about that Van Hoytema man's explosion. What's your opinion of him and his recent performance, prince?"

"Not for publication," the prince stipulated, and the correspondent nodded assent. "Well, I think he's a fool, and acts accordingly. No sensible man need take any notice of him, or anything he may think."

"Captain Castrique's disappeared."

"Captain Castrique was the knave of the combination. And I'll be greatly obliged to you if you'll leave both their names out of any further story concerning me. Will you do me that favor?"

Lester Burdick nodded again, on consideration. He had his own suspicions, but he did not desire to pry into an affair that was, after all, no concern of his.

"Thank you," said the prince, and the simple words expressed his gratification. "If I can ever be of service to you, I hope you will let me know." He caught sight of the Countess Considine on the arm of the Baron Carquois, and went on in pursuit of them.

The punctilious baron bowed, and retired two paces exactly, as the prince addressed the countess, who was able to inform him that the princess and Major-General Mandarin were at that moment approaching, behind his back. The gallant major-general, also, stepped aside, since it is not etiquette to stand listening to the remarks made by royalty to another.

"I've been looking everywhere for you, cousin," declared the prince, offering her his arm. "Do you know, I've just made a very grievous discovery?" he added, with no less reckless directness than usual as he led her onward, talking in a low tone. "My best friend's in a state of suicidal despair —" he noticed that she glanced up at him in sudden alarm, and his own heart beat a shade faster, perhaps with hope, as he took the plunge —"because of you — and your rank in the world as compared with his."

The girl did not at once answer him, and, when she at length spoke, it was in a tremulous tone, scarcely more than a whisper. For a few minutes, they stood talking together in a quiet corner, and then the prince beckoned Major-General Mandarin forward again, and went off by himself to find the ambassador.

"I'm all ready now," he told that expectant master of the ceremonies at the ball-room entrance. "Get the show set, and then I'll come toddling in."

The ambassador bustled away, and the ball-room at once became a scene of intense animation. The favored few, who among so many were to take part in the forthcoming cotillion, mustered in their places, and rank upon rank of no less interested onlookers ranged themselves in a hollow square behind the silken cords that kept clear the dancing-floor. The ubiquitous ambassador was everywhere at once, and in a surprisingly short space of time had the brilliant picture in perfect shape. At his own final post, at one end of the floor, he held up his hand for silence, and all conversation instantly ceased. The orchestra in the gallery overhead struck up a soft romance with a fine marching rhythm to it, and all eyes were turned toward the other end of the vast room and the empty rooms beyond it. At the extreme end of these, the prince and his partner now appeared, as instructed by the ambassador, approaching down that long vista. It was undoubtedly a very effective tableau.

They reached the ball-room entrance, and the music suddenly ceased. A breathless silence obtained for an instant, and then a hundred swords flashed forth from their scabbards to the shrill, eager whicker of steel against steel, met point to point in mid-air with a heartsome clash, and, under that twinkling trellis, amid a thunder of voices such as had never

before, and has only once since disturbed the decorous echoes of the St. Regulus, the purple emperor's heir-apparent paced calmly forward with Noreen Rosewarne at his side.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE PAINTED LADY

THE momentary pause that had occurred in the proceedings as the prince reached the threshold of the ball-room had not formed any part of the ambassador's arrangements. But the ambassador had unexpectedly become confused in his own office, and it was Cullen Seabury, who, noticing the hitch, had taken on himself to give the signal to draw swords. The prince, observing this, smiled softly to himself over the wily diplomat's apparent discomfiture, squeezed his fair partner's hand within his arm encouragingly, and, having reached the place appointed for him, looked the ambassador straight in the face, teeth set, determined to be done with subterfuge. He felt that he had now at last effectually nailed his colors to the mast, and for the future he was minded to defend them openly.

But the ambassador was now all smiles again, and gave the signal to sheathe swords with a verve that would have done a drill-sergeant every credit. The prince and his partner led off the promenade at the head of a couple of hundred couples, the brightest and bravest and best-looking that could be chosen from among the many available. But it was gen-

erally agreed that none of them surpassed the leading pair.

When Baxendale, in the prince's place, had agreed to the ambassador's urgent suggestion that he should take part with the princess in the cotillion, he had made it part of the bargain on his side that he was not to be expected to dance. The promenade over, then, the prince and his partner found themselves installed together on a draped settee, set on a low platform against a background of crimson velvet, in a clear space at the inner end of the ball-room. There they were to remain, apart from the throng, yet plainly to be seen from every farthest corner, while figure after figure of the dance was performed, as if for their entertainment. It was a position somewhat too exposed, perhaps, from the point of view of any mere ordinary wooer, but, the ambassador had reflected, the prince imperial and his cousin of Marque must both be well accustomed to living in the lime-light; and the prince, at least, was finding the situation quite to his mind. He glanced casually over the ordered ranks of upturned faces on either hand, smiled at sight of the ambassador cutting a graceful *gambado* as the more serious business of the cotillion began, and turned to Noreen Rosewarne, as if they two had been quite alone there.

"You weren't afraid, were you, dear?" he asked solicitously, adventuring a word in pursuance of his settled purpose.

"No, I wasn't afraid," she told him, "but what will the princess have to say to me, now? What will

the emperor say — and do — when he hears? Have you counted all the cost of this sudden whimsy of yours?"

"The princess was quite agreeable," he assured her. "I'm not really so graceless as you seem to think me, and I made it right with her first, of course. As for his majesty, he must hear sooner or later that I mean to marry you. The sooner the better, say I, and he may say and do just whatever he pleases — the same as myself. Concerning the cost, I can say nothing more than I've said: if I were offered the whole wide world, with the moon thrown in, to give you up, it would not make the slightest difference. I'm going to get the ambassador to announce, as soon as ever he's finished with this fandango, that we're engaged. I can't trust you out of my sight again before the glad news is made public; or you'll be running away again, and writing me to forget it all, for my own sake."

"I mean well by you," she said in a low voice, and, but for the Argus-eyed multitude about them, he would have seized the little hand lying so near his.

"I know that, dear," he asserted, gladly; "but you'll do ill by me, if you don't follow my advice. There's never a woman but thinks she knows far better than any man what's best for him. But wait till after we're married, before you take the reins out of my incompetent hands. We're still on separate coaches, and I must go on driving my own as best I can, till you come to occupy the box-seat."

"And you're quite determined to sacrifice every-

thing for the sake of a mere fancy?" she questioned, not yet satisfied. "Think for a moment what you would thus sacrifice; and think what a trifling return you would get."

"Don't, dear," he begged. "Don't talk like that. And I'll tell you another little secret, to show you more clearly how the land lies. You saw a good deal of my friend Baxendale in Marque, didn't you? And did you never notice anything between him and the princess?"

The girl shook her head decidedly.

"Where can your pretty eyes have been?" he exclaimed. "He's madly in love with her, just as I am with you. But, in his case, I sadly fear —" He sighed. "I wonder whether she cares in the least for him?"

Noreen Rosewarne looked round at him. She had been watching the dancers.

"Would that make any difference to you?" she asked, and he laughed aloud.

"Not the least little bit of difference," said he, very definitely, "except on Baxendale's account. I've never wanted but one girl for mine in my life, and she isn't the princess, as you very well know. What's more, too, I wouldn't marry the princess, if she were the only spinster left alive. I couldn't. If you weren't going to be my wife, I'd take to the woods, and be a wild bachelor for the rest of my days."

"Why did you send Mr. Baxendale to Marque?" she demanded, suddenly. "He has been a very loyal

friend to you, and it is hard that he should be the one to suffer now."

The prince sighed again.

"It is hard," he agreed. "But — how could I have foreseen any such result? And how do you know it was I who sent him?" he countered quickly, recollecting himself. "May he not have gone there on his own account?"

"I put two and two together. We had heard that a gentleman of that name had been staying with you, and, when he turned up in Marque at such an unusual season, one might be allowed to suppose, under the circumstances, that he had some object there. And he spoke so cordially of you to the princess —"

"Poor old Bolter!" muttered the prince to himself. "I might have known better," he said aloud, "than to match my few wits against two women's. But I didn't know, then, that you, too, were there. My silly scheme has turned out badly for Baxendale up to now, but as soon as I've settled my own affairs — and they won't wait, as you know — I'm going to take a hand in his."

"You're not going to advise the princess to —"

"To take up and hold fast to whatever chances of happiness come to her hand. That's just what I am going to do. And, if she cares for him in that way, I'll back the two of them to the best of my —"

"As prince imperial your influence might carry some weight," she reminded him, "but as an exile, and in disgrace!"

"But we're all surely men and women!" he pro-

tested. "And what difference does unmerited disgrace make?"

"A great difference in the matter of power and place," she asseverated, and he could not deny this.

"Anyhow, we'll both do the best we can to help our two friends," he returned, "and — Heavens! The first figure's over. How time does fly! . . . "A most magnificent spectacle, my dear marquis," he complimented the still smiling ambassador, who, amid the prolonged applause of the onlookers, had taken this opportunity to approach. "Allow me to congratulate you on the success of all your arrangements."

"He had spoken in a voice audible to those nearest at hand above the more general approval, and the gratified ambassador beamed.

"Now's the moment to spring this happy little surprise on him," reflected the prince, rapidly. "He'll have to go on dancing for a while yet, and that will give him time to digest the news."

The ambassador came still nearer in obedience to the gesture of the prince, who leaned forward, for he was none too anxious that Noreen Rosewarne should hear what he had to say.

"I want you to do me a favor, marquis," he said swiftly, in a low tone. "And, if your conscience troubles you in the matter, you may, when the time comes, describe it as a command. Will you please take the first convenient opportunity to make it known to our guests that I have this evening become betrothed to my present partner?"

He sat back, teeth set, defiant. He had made up his mind that, if the ambassador should refuse to obey the order, he himself would make the announcement public. He would not wait another day to hammer such an effective nail home into the coffin of the purple emperor's tyrannical project.

The ambassador was regarding the young man with somewhat disconcerting solemnity.

"Has your imperial highness already determined this?" he asked very gravely, since the issues at stake would go to the making of history, and for whatever part he himself might play he would have to answer to the emperor.

The prince bowed, with a self-contained dignity that sat well on him.

"Absolutely and irrevocably," he answered, while the girl beside him, not knowing what rash step he might be preparing to take next, clasped her hands, a little nervous, yet prepared to trust him implicitly.

But it was the ambassador's next move that proved so startling to them both, although from widely different causes, as he proceeded to carry out the prince's behest with such promptitude as to take the prince's breath away. He had mounted to the last step leading to the platform, held up his hand again, and the last lingering acclamations of the half-finished cotillion were stilled.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said in a ringing voice, after an instant's pause, "I have the honor and privilege to announce to you the betrothal of His Imperial Highness, Prince Juric of Jetland, to Her

Highness, the Princess Ingrid of Marque and the Lesser Isles."

Walls were trembling and windows rattling to the roar of congratulations with which that brief speech was greeted; the glint of uplifted sword-blades once more made lightning above the heads of the dancers; the broad white ripple about them was the women's handkerchiefs waving; there was no man or woman among them all but was in some wise affected by that fitting culmination to what Lester Burdick had styled "A Royal Romance."

The first emotion in the prince's mind was one of anger almost ungovernable against the beaming ambassador, who had thus tricked and betrayed him. And it was only a girl's light hand on his arm that prevented him from springing bodily upon that treacherous confidante. But he sat still for a moment, making up his mind that not even this foul move in the game would make any difference in the end. Presently, when he might make himself heard, he would inform those misguided enthusiasts, who were approving so vociferously an event never to take place, that the ambassador had basely misled them. He took the hand on his arm into both of his, and holding it fast, bent his head to hear what its owner was saying to him.

"You're not angry, are you, dear, because I've deceived you?"

The prince half-rose, and turned toward the girl, then sat down again, gazing into her eyes as if thunderstruck.

"Deceived me!" he ejaculated, some faint conception of what was to be inferred slowly penetrating to his bewildered brain. "Are you — Ingrid of Marque?"

The ambassador came forward, and, kneeling, held out toward her the hilt of his sword. She touched it as one to the manner born, and smiled and bowed her thanks for that assurance of fealty and the heartfelt good wishes he had such hard work to express above the still ringing cheers. But Juric of Jetland, awake at last to the wonderful change this moment had wrought in his future — and not in his only, but also in that of his best friend — would have none of such formal methods. He, too, touched the sword-hilt held out to him, but then he rose to his feet, gripped the ambassador by the hand, raised him from his kneeling posture, and for a space made a perfect pump-handle of that embarrassed conspirator's right arm. At that moment, he would readily have forgiven the diplomat half the crimes in the calendar.

He shouted a word or two into the ambassador's ear, and sat down again.

"Give me a few minutes more here," was what he had said, and the astute marquis was prompt as always.

"His imperial highness desires me to express for the princess and himself," said he, as soon as he could command silence again, "the most profound appreciation of your spontaneous kindness, and he hopes that you will allow him to thank each of you in person at the close of the co-

tillion." Then, signing to the musicians' gallery, he soon had the second part of the dance in progress.

"What a blind fool I've been!" the prince whispered ecstatically into the pretty, pink ear beside him — for the princess was still blushing, embarrassed beyond words by the consequences of his first conference with the ambassador. But he was too intent on his own affairs to be disturbed by the myriad glances still fixed on him and his shy-eyed sweetheart. "What a blind fool I've been! And won't poor old Bolter get the surprise of his life, too, when —? But, of course, it was partly his own fault for letting himself be so easily hoodwinked, though I don't blame him for that — you're such a cunning little witch!" He looked fondly into the downcast face, over which a tremulous smile was once more stealing. "How could you have had the heart to —?"

"I wanted to be quite sure that — that you did not mean to marry me just because you were told to," she whispered, in self-defense. "You must remember that I'm really just a girl, Juric, and be gentle with me. I was — hurt a little, when you sent Mr. Baxendale to Marque, and I hope you won't blame me. It was on the impulse of the moment that I made Noreen take my place there, and at the villa it was easy enough to keep up the pretense. Then, at Nahuel Huapi, we did not know at first what to do, and it seemed best to go on as we had begun — though it was much more difficult there. And, tonight, the ambassador was very hard to convince that any good could come of acting as I had to beg him to

do. But, in the end, no harm has come of it, and I know —"

"You know that it's you I want, and for yourself alone," said the prince, "and now we're going to be very happy, dear. What a wonderful world this is!"

"And — you'll forgive me —"

"Forgive you! What is there to forgive? If I hadn't been such a blind, obstinate fool, we might have been happy together six months ago. And, even now, I've got my own way. Wouldn't it make his majesty mad to hear that I'm going to marry the Painted Lady, after all."

He laughed, in sheer lightness of heart, and she smiled happily up at him.

"And it would have made no difference," she asked, for the sake of hearing that sweet assurance again, "if I had been just an American girl?"

"You wait," he returned meaningly, "till we have fewer folks watching us, and I'll show you." And she blushed and smiled again, so that those still watching her also smiled understandingly.

The cotillion came to an end at last. It had occupied the best part of an hour, although to the prince's conception of the flight of time it might have been going on for either five years or five minutes. On one hand, he felt that he could have sat there forever, exchanging reminiscences and forecasts with the girl whom he had won for his wife, uncompelled and regardless of all precedent; on the other, he was in urgent haste to let Baxendale know what had hap-

pened, to share with his still disconsolate friend the discovery that had so overwhelmed himself.

It still remained, however, to have that historic scene photographed in the interests of the world at large before the dancers should separate, and he could not very well move till this had been duly accomplished. Even then, before he could break away for a moment to find his friend, he was once more penned in by the muster of those now intent on bestowing on him in person their compliments and congratulations. To this further ordeal, he had to submit with the best grace possible. For another hour, he stood there, side by side with the princess, bowing, shaking hands, answering with a smile the set phrases usual on such an occasion, glad when any variation occurred in them. It is mechanical work, hearing or saying the same thing three or four thousand times, but he found some little amusement in singling out two or three of Bolter Baxendale's friends or acquaintances, and greeting them by name.

When Noreen Rosewarne came forward, a little flushed and self-conscious, he had only time to whisper to her while her companion was saying a word to the princess:

"May I not tell poor old Bolter Baxendale now who his princess really is?" And, although she did not actually consent, neither did she deny him permission to do so. She passed on, to kiss the princess and exchange with her a shy, glad glance, and in her place stood the Countess Considine, escorted by Rear-Admiral Agassiz.

Dismissing, with a word or two and a warm hand-shake, the countess, whose roguish glance yet expressed suitable apology and penitence, he detained the rear-admiral long enough to remark with some austerity:

"Let Count Van Hoytema know as soon as you conveniently can that I have decided to pardon his almost unpardonable behavior. He is released from arrest, and may take his place among you again." Rear-Admiral Agassiz would have departed at once on that errand of mercy. "Presently," directed the prince. "Keep your place till you reach the door in due course."

Professor Jocrisse came last and alone, paused for a moment, and spoke.

"Your imperial highness is in safer hands than mine now," said he, and chuckled hugely, then recollected himself, and looked very fierce. Forthwith, he found refuge in clearing his throat. The prince put an arm round the princess, and held her safe till that storm was past. Then, he laughed, and let her go again.

"You've looked after me well, professor," he declared. "I can only hope that his majesty will reward you with an appointment at his own court.

"And, now, sweetheart," he said, in a lower tone, to the tired girl at his side, "I'm going to leave you, if you'll allow me, in the ambassador's care — just for a minute or two. I thought Baxendale might, after all, have turned up among the others, but I'll soon lay hands on him. And, then, we'll

all have supper together, if you'll get hold of Miss Rosewarne in the interval."

As the ambassador led her away to rest for a few minutes in the cool alcove of the almost deserted audience-chamber, the prince went off in the direction of the elevators. He meant to go up himself to Bolter Baxendale's rooms with the news that meant so much to both of them, and bring the hermit back with him.

There were only a couple of footmen at the elevator-entrance and the boy in charge of an empty car awaiting any chance passenger. But, as the prince was about to step into this, another car came to a stop in the shaft adjoining, and an excited hotel-servant darted out as soon as the grating had slipped aside. He had caught sight of the prince.

"Oh, your highness," he cried, stopping short before that surprised personage, who held up a reproving hand so that he instantly lowered his voice. "Your friend upstairs has shot himself. I was sent to ask your leave to fetch in the police."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

BOLTER'S LAST BET

LEFT to himself in his own rooms, while Ernst Coicu was seeing the prince safely back down the service stair to where Professor Jocrisse was awaiting in some not unnatural impatience that headstrong young man's return, Baxendale once more fell an easy prey to the most profound depression. He felt as though the events of this eventful day had indeed made an old man of him. Ernst, reappearing, found him stretched full length in a lounge-chair, chin on chest, eyes fixed on vacancy.

He surrendered himself with a sigh to the ministrations of that artist in make-up, and it was not long before Ernst had completely restored to him his rightful appearance. He finished dressing, and sat down again, but Ernst still lingered, putting the room in order, and, for the sake of peace and quietness, he presently moved into the parlor beyond. He helped himself to a high-ball, lighted a long cigar with fingers that shook in spite of himself, and settled himself in front of the fire, there to consider more at his ease the very unenviable plight in which fate had finally left him stranded.

But he could not now dismiss from his mind the remembrance of his interview with the princess this evening, before Ernst's tragic announcement had so unnerved him. The dying spark of hope in his heart almost flickered into a flame again, as he recalled the tacit confession into which he had, however unfairly, forced her. For he understood now that she had known then who he really was.

And, withal, she had not denied his direct impeachment! Could it possibly be that she cared?

But, even if she did care, how would that help matters now, since he was practically a pauper? The little flame that had warmed his hungry heart died down to a spark again, an infinitesimal spark, and yet one that did not leave him utterly in darkness; and, half an hour later, he shook from his shoulders the chill shadow which was threatening to extinguish it altogether — the shadow that goes by the name of despair. He tossed his cold cigar into the grate, and got up, squaring his shoulders.

"I'll try one more fall with fortune yet," said he to himself encouragingly, and, having found his hat and coat, he set out, on what he knew very well must be the most utterly hopeless of forlorn hopes.

It was now raining heavily, and the crowd in the streets about the hotel had thinned. With the help of a friendly policeman, he got a coupé to the door, and reached Jerry Chancefield's domicile by a roundabout route, but dry. It was there that he intended to give his luck a last chance. And you must

remember now that I am setting down what he did, not what he ought to have done in that time of stress.

Jerry's was rather empty that night, and Jerry himself was not visible. As a matter of fact, he had gone to a vaudeville show, as a species of mental fillip after looking for a long time at the discomforting figures on a cheque he had had to part with. Baxendale met no one he knew on his way upstairs, and the dozen or so of men grouped about the game he affected were all entire strangers to him. Even the croupier there on this occasion was not the usual man, who had asked his employer for a night off on the plea of a head that reminded him too acutely of a boiler about to burst.

The company was, as had seemed usual of late, playing for very moderate stakes, and the acting croupier was raking in no fortune of any enormity. He looked somewhat taken aback as Baxendale sauntered up to the table. Baxendale was well known by sight to a great many more people than he himself could have recognized by head-mark, and he looked still more taken aback when that young man, after having studied the game for a time with a perfectly unreadable face, laid four thousand dollars on *Bolter*.

He looked very little relieved even when *Bolter* lost by a liberal margin, but when Baxendale, without having changed countenance in the least, presently strolled out of the room again, he heaved a

sigh of heartfelt gratitude to his own particular providence. He had feared at first that that reckless gambler was going to double his stake. "There was something in his eye that scared me," he mentioned in explanation of his gusty thanksgiving, and set the wheel spinning again.

Baxendale, outwardly undisturbed, scarcely knew how he got back to the St. Regulus, except that he had not walked. He reached his rooms again, unobserved by any of the revelers making so merry below, turned on all the lights, and then set himself to figure out whether life were really worth living.

He could not but admit to himself that he had somehow made a failure of it, to judge by the situation in which he now found himself. He wondered if he would act differently, supposing he could again live through the circumstances that had led up to this present. On the whole, he was not inclined to think that he would. His conscience was clear enough. He had tried to help a friend in a hole, and got bogged himself; but he would have done no less again for a friend. He had gambled away a good deal of his money, but that had been chiefly before he had found out that only a man with absolutely no ties and no need of any can with impunity throw his gauntlet in fortune's face. He did not honestly believe that, if he were a boy again and therefore lacking this dearly bought knowledge, he would be any more likely to hoard his inherited

wealth. He was not of that nature which is ready to repent as soon as there is no more opportunity to transgress.

The past thus more or less consistently accounted for, he turned his attention to the bleak present. He had just enough money left to pay for the material comfort amid which he was thus uncomfortably cogitating. That cost him no more than the thought. But from below there rose suddenly to his ears a thunder of voices, which brought vividly to his mental vision the scene now being enacted before the friend for whose sake he was fated to suffer so sorely. And, as that uproar at length died away, was succeeded by a dull silence, only broken by the muted murmur of the street, he looked without flinching into the future such as it must now be without — her. It was there that fortune had found the joint in the armor.

He sat very still for a long time before a fire that was all but dead, and did not even look round when Ernst once more knocked and entered.

"Anything I can do for you, sir?" asked Ernst. He was anxious about Baxendale, for some reason not perhaps very clear even to himself, and stayed hovering about the room for a time, in spite of the head-shake that was all the answer he had obtained.

"His highness's engagement has been made public, sir," he at length volunteered, with a view to arousing the young man from his lethargy.

"To whom?" Baxendale demanded.

"To the princess, sir; but not the same lady you

received after dinner. I must have made some mistake, although it was certainly her highness I was told to announce to you."

"Poor Juric!" thought Baxendale, never doubting that that strategist was still promoting his own rash plan, even at the expense of seeming to have accepted the emperor's. "He's making a hard fight for it, but, like myself, he'll find circumstances too strong for him in the end."

But, after Ernst had reluctantly gone off again, a growing and insistent curiosity as to the results of that precarious step began to disturb his dreary speculations as to his own next best move; and, at length, he got restlessly to his feet, and took to pacing about the room.

"I must find out what he's up to," he said to himself — yet still hung back, unutterably averse to confronting his world again in his present frame of mind. But, in the end, curiosity overcame every other instinct. He went through into his dressing-room, on his way to bid that world a long farewell.

"I'll have just one last look at — her," he soliloquized wretchedly, "and then pack up and be off for good. There's no use sitting whimpering here. I'll get to Marseilles somehow, and then — the Foreign Legion — and Africa. That's my way out."

But, even as he had anticipated, he found it no easy matter to make his way unobtrusively through the gathering in the rooms below. Time and again,

he was recognized and delayed in his search by a succession of more or less reproachful friends and acquaintances. It was known to them all now that he had been an intimate of the prince in Europe, and everyone wanted to hear more about that romantic young man. He had the greatest difficulty in answering some of the observations addressed to him by one and another of those whom the prince, masquerading in his place, had met about Fifth Avenue.

He exchanged a few laughing, non-committal remarks with Lester Burdick, who was luckily far too busy to notice any slips he might make. But Ethel Van Rooyen, whom he met next with a youth unknown to him, was once more impelled to reproach him on the score of his obvious loss of memory, when he did not at once recollect having met her at Sherry's on Friday. At that point, however, he brightened up, and, by asking after one or two of the others who had been there, succeeded in satisfying her that he was only suffering from absent-mindedness. Huldah Seabury caught sight of him, and he had to talk to her for five minutes, before he fell into the hands of Oscar Quayle, who seemed to have established a lien on Lillian Delancy's society, since she was still at his side.

"The fifteenth for yours, Bolter," that jovial young gentleman remarked cryptically, and, when Baxendale asked, "What for?" regarded him with a frown.

"What for!" exclaimed Quayle with a tragic

hand at his head. "He asks what for — and after the news we told him on Friday, Lil! You must really see that specialist, Bolter. And, if he leaves you loose so long, we'll look for you at our wedding on the fifteenth. I don't suppose you're aware, are you, that you're booked as my best man!"

"I've been so rattled, Lil, since I got back," Baxendale declared truthfully, and proceeded to extricate himself as gracefully as he might from this further predicament. Scarcely had he disposed of them, when Nesca Carteret, whom he did not know from Eve, stopped him to ask if he had seen her cousin anywhere. He shook his head.

"But I'll tell her you're looking for her, when I do," he assured her, no less ignorant as to who her cousin might be.

The girl for whom he himself was looking he could not see anywhere either, but in the crowd he came across the Countess Considine with the Baron Carquois, and was about to risk the pudgy baron's displeasure by asking whether they knew where the prince or her highness might be, when someone gripped his arm from behind, pulled him forcibly back against the wall. It was the prince himself.

"Good God, Bolter," he exclaimed, "what a scare you've given me! They told me — I thought it was you — that infernal fellow Van Hoytema has topped off his other performances by trying to blow out his brains. And I'd just sent up to let him know that he was released from arrest. Luckily for him-

self, all he has succeeded in doing has been to chip a piece off one ear, but they made as much fuss about that as if he wouldn't be all the better of having them both clipped a good many inches. And — I thought at first it was you!"

"You needn't have," said Baxendale, dully. "I might have thought of it, but — I'm not that sort. Is Van Hoytema in any danger?"

"None in the world," the prince answered, without any very great sympathy. "Luckily, Agassiz reached the room before he could have another try. I might have known, of course, that you wouldn't be such an ass, but, anyhow, I was scared almost blind to think that I might, after all, be too late with my news. Have you heard it yet? Have you seen the princess, or Miss Rosewarne?"

Baxendale shook his head.

"I've heard that your engagement to the princess has been announced," he said, controlling his voice with a great effort of will. "I came down to take a last look at you all before — "

The prince laughed, and so gladly that not a few curious glances were turned on them.

"Come in here out of the crush," he said. "I've only a minute: I must get back to her." Still maintaining his hold, he led Baxendale hastily into a quiet room arranged as a buffet, in which a few unattached men were refreshing their faculties with a cigarette and such liquid concomitant as seemed to each suitable. Among them was Rufus Caffyn, listening amusedly to some tale his exuberant nephew

was telling him, but Baxendale scarcely noticed their nods of greeting to him, as they rose for the prince to pass.

The prince sat down with him in a secluded corner, and laughed again, but Baxendale could by no means force even the faintest smile to his lips. And something of what lay behind his expressionless face became plain to his companion, whose own features instantly assumed a similar gravity.

"Don't you understand, Bolter?" he said. "We've been done brown, both of us. Those two demure young women you met in Marque have beaten us hollow at our own game. It wasn't the princess at all, whose portrait you painted. And you've only yourself to blame for letting them fool you so easily. They must surely have woven some spell about you among those enchanted islands you told me of."

"Do you mean that — the picture you kept — was the princess?" Baxendale asked in a husky whisper, after an interval age-long to him. He had only a hundred dollars in the wide world — and owed most of that.

"It was," said the prince. "Come on now, and we'll see what your fellow-artist has to say for herself!"

Baxendale got up, but stood where he was for a moment or two, looking dazedly about him. The dazzling sunshine that had thus suddenly broken through the dark clouds in his mind almost blinded him. Blinking at a figure before him, he was aware

of Beverly Caffyn, and perceived that the prince was now talking to that volatile youth's uncle, the famous financier.

"Have you been back to Jerry's, Bolter?" demanded Beverly Caffyn. "Did you see the old chap himself? Have you heard what happened when—?"

"I've heard nothing. I looked in there a couple of hours ago. Jerry wasn't about. But, now I think of it, someone shoved a note into my hand, as I was coming out. What's it all about?"

"Haven't you read that note yet?" Caffyn asked, with an expression of pain. "If I were you I wouldn't chuck it away without at least reading it. You'll— Well, I'll see you again."

Baxendale had drawn from some pocket the crumpled envelope he had thrust into it and forgotten, and was about to open it when the prince hurried him off again.

"What d'you think of him for a business man?" commented Beverly Caffyn, rejoining his uncle.

"He could give you twenty-five in fifty, and then win by ten," his uncle was of opinion. But the young man about town was not cast down in consequence.

"That's what everyone thinks," said he, with praiseworthy frankness; "but, if you'll listen to me for a minute, perhaps you'll change your mind."

"I've been doing nothing but listen to you for the last half-hour," objected R. Rufus Caffyn, but the nephew went on, undisturbed:

"I was in Jerry Chancefield's, late this afternoon — "

"I thought I'd told you never to darken his door again!"

"Surely not," Beverly suggested, in a tone of mild surprise. "But no matter. As I was saying, in strolls Bolter, as if creation belonged to him. I chuck him a nod, make a fifty to fill my empty pockets, and quit. Meantime, he lays down a cool hundred — he always backs *Bolter*, you know." His uncle nodded, and made pretense to yawn. "I trot round the table to talk to him — "

"You're always talking," interpolated the listener.

"He loses his hundred, chucks down another couple of notes, and we retire to the window. From the window, he sees some girl, and instantly bolts after her."

"With you at his heels, still talking, eh?"

"Leaving me to make whatever I like of his addle-headed behavior. So, I take a look at his stake for him: and it's eight-thousand — two-hundred — dollars. Left lying like that — and on *Bolter*! If I had eight thousand dollars I wouldn't lose it like that."

"Well, you're not likely to have 'em, so never mind."

"But *Bolter* made 'em for Baxendale. And I claimed them for him. And the croupier was agreeable, but — before I could lift them the wheel was started again — they work it on time, you know.

And *Bolter* came romping home again! "Did you ever hear the equal of that! How much is eight thousand two hundred dollars at forty to one?"

"Three hundred and twenty-eight thousand," answered smartly R. Rufus Caffyn, the famous financier, carried away in spite of himself, and then smiled as he noticed his graceless nephew's approving nod.

"Add the stake, and you'll have the exact amount of the cheque Jerry Chancefield tucked away in that envelope Bolter Baxendale was too tired to open. I saw it written and signed myself, so I ought to know. I managed the whole business for Bolter — and I'll bet you never made a bigger haul in the time, without doing a hand's turn for it."

"I work for my living."

"So do I — and a precious poor living I make! Have another cigarette, uncle? I wish you'd tell me about that two hundred thousand dollar bet you lost to Bolter coming in on the *Mauretania*. By Jove, here he is back again!"

The prince had not got very far with his friend when he caught the eye of a pretty girl passing, and, since he smiled to her very amiably, she was thereby emboldened to remark to Baxendale:

"I found my cousin."

"Where, Miss Carteret?" asked the prince.

"She's with the princess in the reception-room now, your highness," the girl answered, with a graceful curtsey.

"Who's that?" inquired Baxendale as they went on.

"A friend of yours and mine," returned the prince, airily. "She'll be your cousin-in-law some day soon, if you're lucky." And he led the way toward the alcove in the audience-chamber, where he had left his own lady-love in the ambassador's charge. But they encountered the ambassador in the doorway, and that dignitary delayed the prince to explain his absence from the post to which he had been detailed, and to obtain his imperial highness's approval of a cable despatch to the purple emperor he had held up for that purpose.

"Right ho," commented the jubilant prince. "Whack it over the wires. It will please his majesty." Then, looking round for Baxendale, "Come on, Bolter," he commanded.

But Baxendale, stirred by Beverly Caffyn's recent expression of pained reproach, had taken that opportunity to find out what it was Jerry Chancefield could have to say to him. At sight of the cheque, which was all the envelope in his hand contained, he had bolted incontinently back toward the buffet. The prince caught sight of him, head and shoulders above the rest of the throng, as he disappeared in the distance, and, after an instant of incensed indecision, went on his own way, very well satisfied on the whole with himself and everyone else.

It did not take Beverly Caffyn long to repeat to Baxendale what he had just told his uncle. And Baxendale listened to him outwardly attentive, if

quite unconcerned, of appearance, inwardly with the stupefied feelings of one in a mental trance.

"So that, what with the two hundred thousand you won from my Uncle Rufus, Bolter," concluded that sapient young man, "you've done yourself very handsomely these last few days."

Baxendale regarded the speaker gravely. He had already made up his mind that he would never again tempt fortune to undo what she had now done for him — all but too late. He could not but feel that he had really fared far better than he deserved, and that he would indeed deserve ill of the future, if he did not now take to heart the lesson of those bitter hours he had just spent alone.

"It was only twenty thousand," he answered, "and the newspapers multiplied it by ten, as they very often do in such instances. And I'll tell you something more, Beverly. This cheque only represents a small part of what I've paid for the sake of whiling away an hour or two at Jerry Chancefield's, or some other place of the sort. Jerry's had three times its amount from me first and last, and I've come to the belated conclusion that I might just as well light a fire with my money. I've made my last bet."

"Come downtown as soon as ever I get back from Europe again," said R. Rufus Caffyn suddenly, "and talk business with me for half an hour. Will you, Bolter?"

Baxendale nodded, very much gratified by this signal mark of approval on the part of a man who,

he knew, had heretofore lightly esteemed him no more than a pleasant acquaintance, and, leaving Beverly Caffyn also not a little impressed, departed again with a purposeful stride.

Dancing was in full swing then in the ball-room, but he did not pause to admire the brilliant spectacle there. Making his way through the anterooms toward the audience-chamber, he was startled by an explosive uproar, and saw Geoffrey Paige approaching arm in arm with Professor Jocrisse. When he observed what state Geoffrey Paige was in, he understood what was happening. That pot-valiant youth shook a fat fist at him, and would willingly have waited to express in improper words the grievances that had been fermenting since morning in his bemuddled brain, but the irresistible force at his side was impelling him at a decorous pace in the direction of the elevators, and, every time he opened his mouth, Professor Jocrisse cleared his throat. It was as though some royal personage had been departing, to the accompaniment of a salvo of guns.

The alcove in the distance seemed to be empty, and Baxendale, disappointed, slackened his stride. But, when he reached it, determined to make quite sure, he noticed, under the curtain that concealed its nearest corner from him, what looked suspiciously like the toe of a dainty satin shoe: and there in the shadow he found the girl to whom he had so much to say.

She had raised her fan to her face, as he suddenly appeared. Her eyes were downcast. He bowed,